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**COMMUNICATIONAL STRATEGIES IN  
EDWARD ALBEE'S AND MARTIN WALSER'S  
WORK. A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

Margrit Stern

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in German

Birkbeck College  
University of London

## **Declaration**

The material presented in this thesis is the original work of the candidate except as otherwise acknowledged. It has not been submitted previously, in part or whole, for a degree, at any university, at any other time.

Margrit Stern

## Abstract

This thesis is based on a comparative study of plays by two contemporary authors: *Die Zimmerschlacht* and *Ein fliehendes Pferd* by the German author Martin Walser and *A Delicate Balance* by the American playwright Edward Albee. Critics have stressed the emphasis which both playwrights lay on dialogue as the driving force of their dramatic art. Hence an analysis with pragmatics appears particularly pertinent.

I demonstrate that methods and findings from linguistic pragmatics applied to ordinary language are equally relevant to critical analysis of dramatic action. My work draws in a broad but targeted way on pragmatic devices mainly from three different studies: G. Leech, *The Principles of Pragmatics*, P. B. Brown and S. C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* and P. Watzlawick, J. B. Bavelas, D. D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication. A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies and Paradoxes*. I elaborate on how the tenets of pragmatics expose levels of meanings and character's motivations not immediately derivable from the surface structure of utterances. I aim to provide pragmatic devices to explore a character's behaviour and communicational targets and also focus on the level of communication between playwrights and audiences.

Notwithstanding their cultural differences both authors reveal similarities in their approach. They are concerned with social reality and its effect on human relations. Although not overtly political the plays by the two authors clearly denounce the refusal of individuals to engage beyond their own interests as social conformism thereby suggesting the necessity of embracing a more tolerant and empathetic attitude. Language is shown to illustrate the individual struggle between social demands, private desire and demands of contemporary society.

# TABLE OF CONTENT

## COMMUNICATIONAL STRATEGIES IN EDWARD ALBEE'S AND MARTIN WALSER'S WORK A COMPARATIVE STUDY

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2 Preliminary Theoretical and Methodological Remarks</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3 Theoretical Premises</b>	<b>44</b>
3.1 The Development of Pragmatics	44
3.2 The Pragmatic Approach in Literary Conversation	49
<b>4 Pragmatic Theories</b>	<b>51</b>
4.1 Leech's Conversational Principles	51
4.1.1 Principles and Maxims	54
4.1.2 Some General Properties of the Principles of Pragmatics	58
4.1.3 Higher-order Principles	60
4.1.3.1 The Irony Principle	60
4.1.3.2 Banter	64
4.1.3.3 The Hinting Strategy	65
4.1.4 The Obliquity and Uninformativeness of Negation	66
4.1.5 Pragmatic Paradoxes of Politeness	67
4.1.6 Tact and Condescension	69
4.1.7 Metalinguistic Aspects of Politeness	69

4.1.8 The Phatic Maxim	71
4.1.9 Hyperbole and Litotes	72
4.1.10 Pragmatic Scales	74
4.1.11 Conclusion	77
4.2 Brown and Levinson's Theory: Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use	78
4.2.1 Possible Strategies for doing FTAs	86
4.2.2 Sociological Variables that go into Assessing an FTA	89
4.2.3 Exploitation of Strategies	91
4.2.4 Conclusion	93
4.3. The Socio Psychological Aspect of Communication: Speech-Acts and Social Action	94
4.3.1 Watzlawick's Theory of Communication	96
4.3.1.1 Watzlawick's Axioms of Human Communication	101
1) The Impossibility of not Communicating	102
Rejection of Communication:	104
Acceptance of Communication:	104
Disqualification of Communication:	104
2) The Content and Relationship Levels of Communication	106
Definition of Self and Other	107
Confirmation	108
Rejection	109
Disconfirmation	110
Pragmatic Paradoxes	111
Paradoxical Injunctions	111
3) The Punctuation of the Sequence of Events	114
The Self-fulfilling Prophecy	117
4) Digital and Analogic Communication	118
5) Symmetrical and Complementary Interaction	119
4.3.1.2 The Organization of Human Interaction	123
4.3.1.3 Final Observations	129
4.4 Summary	130
4.5 Literary and Everyday Discourse: A Pragmatic Perspective	139
4.5.1 Dramatic Features	146

4.5.1.2 Dramatic and Extra-Dramatic Conversation	153
<b>5 Analysis of the Plays</b>	<b>155</b>
5.1 Die Zimmerschlacht	155
5.1.1 Walser's Dramatic Conception	155
5.1.2 The Structure of the Play	159
5.1.3 Felix's Concealment Strategies	160
5.1.4 The Function of the Erotic Games	172
5.1.5 Symmetrical Escalation	177
5.1.6 Confrontation with Reality	183
5.1.7 Return to the old System	191
5.2 Ein fliehendes Pferd	195
5.2.1 Origin and Synopsis	195
5.2.2 Group Dynamics and Communication	200
5.2.3 Helmut and Sabine: Avoidance against Persuasion	202
5.2.4 Helmut and Klaus: Assertion versus Evasiveness	215
5.2.5 Irony	226
5.2.6 The Dénouement	231
5.2.6.1 Apparent Forms of Communication in Conflict with Reality: Paradoxical Communication between Klaus and Hel	232
5.2.6.2 The Turning Point: The Breakdown of Communication	236
5.2.7 Conclusion	241
5.3 A Delicate Balance	246
5.3.1 Albee's Dramatic Conception: Synopsis	246
5.3.2 Agnes and Tobias: Ritualized Interaction	248
5.3.3 The Disruption of the Balance: Harry and Edna	254
5.3.4 'Crises sure brings out the best in us, don't it Tobe?'	258
5.3.5 Tobias's Insight	263
5.3.6 Conclusion:	272
<b>6 Conclusion</b>	<b>276</b>
<b>7 Bibliography</b>	<b>290</b>
Martin Walser Primary Literature	290

Martin Walser Secondary Literature	291
Edward Albee Primary Literature	292
Edward Albee Secondary Literature	293
Pragmatic Theory	295
General Reference Works	297

## List of Abbreviations

### Leech's Conversational Principles

CP	Cooperative Principle
PP	Politeness Principle

### Plays

by Martin Walser:

<i>FP</i>	Ein Fliehendes Pferd
<i>ZS</i>	Die Zimmerschlacht

by Edward Albee:

<i>DB</i>	A Delicate Balance
<i>ZSt</i>	The Zoo Story
<i>VW</i>	Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf



# 1 Introduction

This project offers a pragmatic linguistic study of plays by two contemporary authors, Martin Walser and Edward Albee, through detailed analysis of *Die Zimmerschlacht* and *Ein fliehendes Pferd* by Martin Walser as well as *A Delicate Balance* by Edward Albee.<sup>1</sup> I shall illustrate extensively that an analysis of interaction based on linguistic pragmatics contributes to a full interpretation of the language used and thus to the understanding of the work of both authors. Albee's and Walser's dramatic oeuvres, like that of many of their contemporaries, focuses on the role of language in inter-personal interaction. Rainer Taeni comments on Walser's play *Der Abstecher*: 'Vor allem sind die Figuren konsequent daraufhin angelegt, daß sie sich nur durch Reden nicht durch Handeln beweisen', a statement that has much in common with A. K. Oberg's description of Albee's work: 'Whatever contact Albee's characters manage to establish [...] is achieved exclusively within and by means of words'.<sup>2</sup> Albee's and Walser's works are particularly well suited to an in-depth analysis based on linguistic pragmatics. By drawing in a broad but targeted way on pragmatic insights for the investigation of the dramatic interaction, I am able to elucidate the structure and content of the plays, to identify the concerns of the authors and to establish a comparison between them. The works I analyse here are drawing room plays and products of a similar period, albeit located in the different contexts of America and Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Walser, 'Die Zimmerschlacht', in *Martin Walser: Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 117-164, M. Walser, *Ein fliehendes Pferd* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) and Edward Albee, *A Delicate Balance* (New York: Samuel French, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> See R. Taeni, 'Modelle einer entfremdeten Gesellschaft? Über Martin Walser's Dramen', in *Text und Kritik*, 1974 January, p. 65.  
For Edward Albee see A. K. Oberg, 'Edward Albee: his Language and Imagination', *Prairie Schooner*, XL (1966), 139-146.

They were written in the 1960s and 70s dealing with contemporary western culture and upper middle class characters. They are not overtly political, but are culturally, politically and economically situated and the interaction between the characters reflects problems of their societies.

It is crucial to point out that my analysis of the plays calls on theories and methods which were themselves developed between 1967 and 1983,<sup>3</sup> the same period in which the authors produced their dramatic and literary oeuvres. The evolution in the study of human communication reflected shifts in the way individuals saw themselves relating to others in post-war western societies. I will indicate below how the attention given to every-day language by the linguistic pragmatic theorists I have studied – namely Geoffrey Leech, Brown and Levinson and the more sociologically and psychologically oriented Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson – is to be seen as correlated to a more differentiated view of the individual in his/her context characteristic of a post-war period which witnessed the questioning of the foundations of social and political organisation in our societies. The relationship between personal behaviour and relationship patterns on the one hand and interiorized social and ideological pressures and constraints on the other was a decisive concern from the 50s through to the 80s and 90s. The portrayal, description and understanding of mechanisms of alienation on all levels of personal and social relationship structures had a considerable impact on arts, politics, social sciences and psychology. This materialised in its most striking

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<sup>3</sup> See G. Leech, *The Principles of Pragmatics* (Harlow: Longman, 1983), P.B. Brown and S.C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) and P. Watzlawick, J.B. Bavelas, D.D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967). Since in linguistic studies the book is referred to as 'Watzlawick's Theory of Communication' I will for reasons of readability only refer in the text to Watzlawick instead of naming all three authors.

form in the student revolts of the 60s where political action was accompanied or even replaced by cultural activism . Against these backgrounds Albee tackles, among many other concerns, the disintegration of the American dream, Walser similarly exposes in his work the contradictions of the ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ and the effects of its post-war materialism on inter-personal relationships.

I will elaborate in detail on how the different theories of literary pragmatics enter into a dialogue with the social upheavals of the period in which they were produced by participating in decoding the ways in which psychological, social and political context is mirrored in language as our most fundamental means of expression.

The analysis of Walser’s and Albee’s works in section 5 reveals similarities in their approaches which are indicated through cross references in the readings of individual works. Martin Walser himself suggested that he is aware of such analogies between his own and Albee’s work, as Jörg Magenau states in his biography of the author.<sup>4</sup> *Die Zimmerschlacht* written in 1962/63 shows how characters in a matrimonial partnership, eager to secure their own individuality, verbally humiliate each other and set out to destroy each other’s personality. The reason the play only had its premiere in 1967 was Walser’s concern that Albee’s play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which had a similar theme, had been shown to great acclaim in 1963 and would diminish the impact of his own play.

In my analysis of *Die Zimmerschlacht* (section 5.1.1) I will elaborate on Walser’s resolve, at the time of the play’s staging, to turn away from the explicitly political to the realm of the personal and psychological. He sketched his evolution

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Jörg Magenau, *Martin Walser. Eine Biographie*. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2005), p. 257.

towards a form he would later term 'Bewußtseinstheater'.<sup>5</sup> Individual consciousness shaped by social or economic context appeared not only to him but also to many of his contemporaries as an issue on which to focus. In this respect, Walser's work reflects broader cultural developments. The debates in and around different social and political movements of the 60s and 70s both in Europe and North America were regularly fuelled by a growing opposition to a dogmatic style of politics. Subjective personal experience grew equally, if not more, relevant as feminists, and many others, claimed that the personal *is* political. The cultural revolution initiated in the 60s opened spaces of performance and other forms of cultural production to the reality of everyday experience and its political ramifications. The intrusion of the present and the ordinary in previously reserved spaces of cultural representation pursued an empowerment of the spectator through new forms of realism.

The understanding of the subjective mechanisms of power structures (social, economic or ideological) became an issue of critical interest. The background against which both playwrights and linguists evolved during this period is characterised as follows by Hayden White in his contribution to *Revisiting the Sixties, Interdisciplinary Perspectives on America's Longest Decades*:

In many respects, the socio-dynamics of the Sixties can be comprehended as a result of a new generation's lived experience of what Marxist historians call 'contradiction', social psychologists have labelled as 'double-bind', and others, of a more artistic or literary bent, call enigma, paradox, or irony. And no one lived this experience of contradiction more than that cohort of Sixties' young people 70 million in number caught in the web of contradictions called 'adolescence'. Quite simply, what Gregory Bateson called the "double bind" consisted of that quintessential social situation explained by Aristotle, Rousseau,

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<sup>5</sup> see my elaborations on *Die Zimmerschlacht*, section 5.1.

Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Weber, Dürkheim, and Marcuse as the very basis of life in society in which, by trying to live up to one principle of law, morality, or custom, you inevitably and even necessarily violate another. Thus, for example, the double bind of the bourgeois father's order to his son to "be like me" and, at the same time, "be an individual." Or: The idea that one has to be ruthless in the pursuit of economic gain but, at the same time, "love thy neighbour." "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains": how is this possible, asks Rousseau. To which the Puritan capitalist answers: to him who has, it shall be given; and to him who has not, it shall be taken away even that which he has.<sup>6</sup>

The work of the linguists whose theories I employ in this research consciously contributes to decoding the actions and structures of everyday language. The reference by White to a term (double bind) which is prominently employed by Watzlawick in *Pragmatics of Human Communication* points towards a whole field of mutually illuminating areas of creation and research nourished by the historic context. The popularisation of psychology and psychotherapeutic terminology also influenced social behaviour and was often reflected by literature offering a heightened awareness of personal identity, sexuality and mental health problems. A significant example for this new awareness was the counter movement to the psychiatric orthodoxy. In this context feelings of individuals were regarded as valid descriptions of lived experience rather than simply as symptoms of some separate or underlying disorder. Essential for the study of this approach were the works of R. D. Laing published in the 1960s and beyond.<sup>7</sup>

Laing was revolutionary in valuing the content of psychotic behaviours as valid expressions of distress, meaningful within their situation, and not as symptoms of

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<sup>6</sup> Hayden White 'The Substance of the Sixties', in Laura Bieger, Christian Lammert (editors): *Revisiting the Sixties: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on America's Longest Decade* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> See amongst his other works: R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960) and *The Self and Others* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961).

mental illness. He took up Gregory Bateson's and his colleagues' articulation of a theory of schizophrenia as stemming from double bind situations causing mental distress as a person receives different and contradictory messages.<sup>8</sup> Laing provided a similar description of psychosis. The strange behaviour of people undergoing a psychotic episode is interpreted as an attempt to communicate worries and concerns in situations where this is not otherwise possible. The significance of the notion of the double bind for the understanding of pragmatic linguistics is evident from Watzlawick's writings in *Pragmatics of Human Communication*. It will also be evident in my analysis of the plays that will deal extensively with the concept. Watzlawick in his study draws amply on R. D. Laing's work to illustrate his pragmatic theories. Similarly Watzlawick's analysis of interaction between humans is based on the concept that pathogenic structures and thus schizophrenia are approached differently when seen in ongoing interaction.<sup>9</sup> The political, psychological and linguistic movements of the time are indeed connected as suggested in the above quotation by Hayden White. Without wanting to limit the scope of my method only to plays of this period, it can be said that they do offer an exciting testing ground for the application to literary criticism of linguistic theories which evolved within a context of related developments in a number of fields.

In this introduction I will refer in detail to other critical literature on Walser's and Albee's work, while under section 2, *Preliminary Theoretical and Methodological Remarks*, I will give a brief account of other studies that have

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<sup>8</sup> Bateson, G., Jackson, D.D., Haley, J. & Weakland, J. (1956). Toward a theory of Schizophrenia, *Behavioural science*, 1(4), 251-264.

<sup>9</sup> Compare my elaborations on Watzlawick et al., section 4.3.1. See also fn. 117 on Goffman's conclusions that bear similarities to Watzlawick's approach.

used pragmatic linguistics concepts for the analysis of certain aspects of literary works with similar strategies to the ones that I will be examining. My own research provides a full analysis of the plays mentioned above based mainly on pragmatic devices. To facilitate this I have made a comprehensive study of the linguistic pragmatic theories in the works of Geoffrey Leech, *The Principles of Pragmatics*, Brown and Levinson *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use* and the more sociologically and psychologically oriented study by Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*.<sup>10</sup>

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of how speakers communicate through language and how interaction between individuals can influence and even change situations. Methods and findings from linguistic pragmatics are as applicable to dramatic language as they are to ordinary language. While in section 4.5.1.1 I will discuss in detail the differences and similarities between ordinary and literary language, at this point it can be stated that both are subject to similar conventions. To the objection that dramatic language is carefully patterned and thought out it can be said that ordinary talk is equally controlled by the participants who organize their interaction in an orderly fashion. Audiences and dramatists share similar rules of conversational behaviour and dramatic language generally works by exploiting the modes of ordinary language in order to create realistic situations. The analysis of the plays in section 5 indicates how with the help of pragmatic strategies day-to-day language is adapted to dramatic speech.

Pragmatics allows us to examine what motivates interactants to express themselves in a certain way and also to investigate longer communicational sequences and the reactions of the communicants to each other's utterances as

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<sup>10</sup> See fn 3.

they shape the structure of the plays. It is significant for the analysis of dramatic works that the strategies of pragmatics enable us to shed light on levels of meanings that are not directly derivable from the surface structure of utterances thereby providing strategies to analyse interaction between characters as well as examine the level of communication between playwrights and audiences. The period with which I am concerned was generally characterized by a new and interdisciplinary concern with the notion of communication. Cultural shifts in the way individuals saw themselves relating to others were accompanied by evolutions in the study of human communication during the 1960s and 1970s. As described by Virginia P. Richmond and James C. McCroskey, the growing importance of a relational approach over the rhetorical tradition was accompanied by the emergence of new disciplines and an increasing number of research units and university departments concerned with communication studies rather than speech.<sup>11</sup> I have found the linguistic pragmatics that emerged in this context particularly suited to the analysis of plays from the same period which tend to reproduce day-to-day conversation and consequently highlight interactions between characters who, in a similar fashion to individuals in everyday life, have divergent interests that are played out on the stage.

While in section 4 I will give a detailed account of each of the theories that provide the framework for my analysis, as well as the reasons for applying them to literature and especially drama it seems useful for the understanding of my research to outline at this point in broad terms the main concepts on which pragmatics are based. Pragmatics differentiates itself from ‘syntax’ that analyses

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<sup>11</sup> Virginia P. Richmond and James C. McCroskey, ‘Human Communication Theory and Research: Traditions and Models’ in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research* Edited by Don W. Sacks and Michael B. Salven, (Routledge: London, 2014), p.228.



how language is structured, and ‘semantics’ that investigates how language conveys meaning, since it is not about what language does but what speakers do with language. The theory that linguistic acts are equal to actions has been put forward by Austin who concluded that everyday language was not primarily about making statements but about *doing* things with language, that is, performing speech acts to accomplish a goal. Austin concluded that speech acts were more than locutionary acts (the act of saying something), being rather illocutionary acts that convey an illocutionary force, i.e. intending a meaning that cannot be deduced from form alone. While Austin explained that illocutionary acts were largely dependant on the issue of context, Searle extended Austin’s theory by defining and differentiating the various kinds of speech acts and analysing the underlying conditions to which they were subject. For example, the act ‘to advise’ which is designed to benefit the hearer must meet different conditions from the act ‘to promise’ which must be a future act predicted by the speaker that will also benefit the hearer.<sup>12</sup>

While Austin and Searle looked at communication from the speaker’s point of view, Grice was interested in the hearer’s reaction. Starting from the premise that speakers often mean or imply more than they say, Grice developed a set of guidelines which could account for the way in which hearers are able to discern these unsaid meanings. Grice’s Cooperative Principle and its maxims, which are generally accepted as underlaying every talk exchange, may be briefly stated as follows. Maxim of quantity: make your contribution as informative as required. Maxim of quality: do not say what you believe to be false. Maxim of relation: be

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<sup>12</sup> See J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962). See also J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

relevant. Maxim of manner: avoid ambiguity. While these maxims define the basic set of assumptions in talk, this is not to imply that utterances in general, or even reasonably frequently, must meet these conditions and it is precisely the deviations from these maxims that allow people to look for meanings beyond the actual utterance in order to find an interpretation that makes sense in the given context. Both Leech, as well as Brown and Levinson, who have had a significant impact on the field of pragmatics, have based their findings on Grice's Cooperative Principle and its maxims while adding devices of their own. Leech has added the Politeness Principle and its maxims that serve to maintain the social equilibrium by explaining why interactants are often indirect in conveying what they mean. Like Leech's, Brown and Levinson's findings are based on the assumption of mutual cooperation and they too propose that it is concerns of politeness that govern how speakers choose to realize given acts in discourse. The common and mutually held assumption of cooperation in talk is often exploited in ways that mean that interactants have to look at meanings beyond the actual utterance in order to find an interpretation that makes sense. They have outlined an extensive apparatus based on the principles of politeness which accounts for the numerous situations that allow people to deviate from the observance of the Gricean Cooperative Principle. Both Leech's and Brown and Levinson's studies which will be explained in detail in section 3 are significant for the analysis of the plays in section 5.

Watzlawick's pioneering work, first published in 1967, pays more attention to how interaction develops beyond how speakers formulate messages and how they are understood by hearers. By examining larger units of interaction, Watzlawick's theory provides a picture of how communication and miscommunication take

place. Watzlawick's take on pragmatics is based on the understanding of the location of interactants in a particular situation and on their observable dependence on each other's behaviour. He envisaged a series of axioms and properties derived from them in order to provide a framework for the analysis of successful and failed communication. Examples from daily life, politics and dramatic works help to explain Watzlawick's theory, illustrating the manifold possibilities of human communication.

The above explanations should give a general overview of the theoretical approach to the analysis of the plays in question. Pragmatic theories have throughout their development provided a broad approach to speech analysis always relating meaning to context. The profound philosophical and political implications of such a suggestion prompted works and comments beyond the realm of linguistics by diverse authors such as Jürgen Habermas for example who connected pragmatics to his social and political theories.<sup>13</sup> My own research consciously limits itself to probing precisely the pertinence of pragmatic principles in an applied study of specific dramatic works. My aim is that the results of my study will provide new or different links to the far-reaching investigations of these writers as well as the many works dedicated to pragmatics. In this study I have chosen to apply selective elements of the three different pragmatic theories quoted above for the wealth of tools they offer for the analysis of dialogue. Leech and Brown and Levinson as their principles and methods are clearly a reference for pragmatic research and Watzlawick whose Theory of Communication proved particularly inspiring for my research into the dramatic

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<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998)  
— *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Toronto: Beacon Press, 1976).

works I am concerned with. I will also refer to Sperber and Wilson whose work proved especially useful in the examination of the mechanisms of irony. Thus, these theories will enable me to offer a full interpretation of the effect of language in the plays and allow for an in-depth examination of a variety of interactional situations. This will allow me to offer perspectives different from those to be found in other kinds of analyses of Martin Walser's and Edward Albee's plays. I will illustrate that here with a concise description of some of the trends identifiable in the critical literature on these two authors which I have engaged with in my own work.

While the critical approaches to Walser's plays *Die Zimmerschlacht* and *Ein fliehendes Pferd* almost exclusively focus on the overall meaning of the texts, criticism on Albee's work looks more specifically towards the reasons for failure of communication between interactants.

Regine Brede's study written in 1974, *Die Darstellung des Kommunikationsproblem in der Dramatik Edward Albees*, concentrates on the effect of language in interaction.<sup>14</sup> She points, for example, to the linguistic mechanism that Agnes, the figure around whom most of the action in *A Delicate Balance* revolves, uses to impose on the other characters her ideas for the preservation of the family order. Brede also examines other linguistic strategies, for instance how the unexpected appearance of Harry and Edna and their demands leads to a heated debate on the obligations imposed by friendship. Concealment tactics are shown by Brede to be revealed by Tobias's use of ellipses which indicate his non-commitment. Tobias's final emotional outburst, to which none of

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<sup>14</sup> Regine Brede, *Die Darstellung des Kommunikationsproblem in der Dramatik Edward Albees* (Doctoral thesis: Erlangen, 1981).

those present reacts, is seen by Brede as a breakdown of communication on the character level. Thus there only remains the communication between author and audience who are forced to deal with the frozen communicational structures. In her introduction Brede makes reference to Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas and Don D. Jackson's work *Pragmatics of Human Communication*,<sup>15</sup> giving a general overview of its fundamental concepts. She points out that this work contributes to the understanding of dialogue in the plays but the strategies are neither described in detail nor does she show how they allow us to understand how the dialogue works, as I shall do in the present study.

Other critics are less concerned with the way language works in Albee's plays. Anita Maria Stenz's study, *Edward Albee. The Poet of Loss* focuses on the failure of human relationships in whatever combination they occur. She sees Albee's characters as individualized and psychologically motivated but demonstrates how circumstances have made them into what they are. Her analysis of *A Delicate Balance* shows that the appearance of the friends, whose stay the members of the family are unwilling to accept, exposes a lack of emotional honesty and, in this way, the emptiness of human relationships. But Stenz also sounds a slightly more optimistic note by suggesting that there are no clear cut villains or heroes in Albee's plays and that in *A Delicate Balance* at the end small gestures towards each other indicate that the experience might have taught the characters to accept each other for whom they are and not to push each other too far for proof of love.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Watzlawick et al., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Anita Maria Stenz, *Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978).

Susanne Westermann's study *Die Krise der Familie* shows that even though the conflict within the family in Albee's work could be seen as representing the state of American society as a whole, Albee limits himself to a large extent to the representation of the family crisis of the individual in American society without touching explicitly on the wider social context of that crisis. She sees in this a conservative tendency that is determined by Albee's own individualistic approach which often comes to light in his plays as indicated by Tobias's political attitude in *A Delicate Balance*.<sup>17</sup>

Critics frequently mention Albee alongside Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as one of the great American dramatists of the twentieth century. In spite of his status Albee, as Stephen Bottoms emphasizes, continues to 'consistently refuse[s] to do what is expected of him'.<sup>18</sup> There is a time span of forty-five years between *The Zoo Story*, the one act play that was to make his name first shown in 1959, and *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* premiered in 2002. The first shows Jerry's unrestrained condemnation of the bourgeois world embodied in the character of Peter. In *The Goat or Who's Sylvia?* Albee still unsettles conventional sensibilities by depicting the protagonist falling in love with a goat which results in a situation where the desires for love, companionship and sexual contact are confusingly intertwined. From the great deal of critical material published on Albee I refer to the very comprehensive work edited by Stephen Bottom *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee* that contains a

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<sup>17</sup> Susanne Westermann, *Die Krise der Familie bei Edward Albee* (Heidelberg: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> See Stephen Bottoms, 'Introduction: The man who had three lives' *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, ed. Stephen Bottoms (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 1.

number of extensive essays from critics well acquainted with Albee's oeuvre.<sup>19</sup>

While I will comment in detail here only on essays on the plays examined in my present study, I would also like to refer to the critical insights into Albee's renowned works *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which are significant for an understanding of Albee's attitude to his work as a whole.

Philip C. Kolin's study includes *The Zoo Story* in an essay on Albee's early one-act plays.<sup>20</sup> Kolin finds that with this one act play Albee established himself as a master of language which he will prove again and again in his later full-length plays. By opposing Jerry and Peter *The Zoo Story* develops a parable about the human condition showing how opposites can be reconciled through communication and commitment. In his essay 'Albee's 3 ½: The Pulitzer Plays', Thomas P. Adler describes how in *A Delicate Balance* language is used as a means of protection against the characters' self-imposed stasis which has been so long in place that they have been able to block out an awareness of any other way of life.<sup>21</sup> Their unexpected guests', Harry's and Edna's, need for protection has not been met and only Tobias's last minute emotional plea asking them to stay indicates his realization that their lives have been empty and void of engagement with others. But according to Adler's interpretation Tobias's plea comes with the awareness that it is too late for any significant change and that once the guests are

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Philip C. Kolin, 'Albee's early one-act plays "A new American playwright from whom much is to be expected"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, ed. Stephen Bottoms (Cambridge: University Press, New York, 2005), pp. 16-37.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas P. Adler, 'Albee's 3 ½: The Pulitzer plays' in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, pp. 75-90.

gone the order that Agnes reimposes will block out anything that might threaten the continuation of what the author calls 'their death in life existence'.<sup>22</sup>

Mathew Roudane's analysis of '*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf: Toward the Marrow*', sees *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as Edward Albee's most affirmative play.<sup>23</sup> The action takes place in Martha's, the daughter of the college president, and George's home. Martha has invited the younger couple, Nick and Honey for a nightcap which turns into an all-night party. The spectator is presented with some three and a half hours of the characters attacking each other with verbal insults, psychological assaults and with revealing moments in which the protagonists' own sense of dread is laid bare. This would confirm Albee's essentially pessimistic approach and it therefore appears quite incomprehensible that it would be seen as his most affirmative play. According to Roudane, however, this does not really capture the resolutions that are revealed in the denouement where the characters, unmasked by their own actions, deprived of the fictional and not always comprehensible dramatic world they have constructed for themselves, shift the tone of the play. The verbal duelling that animated the evening is sacrificed, making place for carefully uttered short formulations that indicate the will for a new beginning, however uncertain it may prove to be.

Roudane views the devastating language war, before it gives way to the denouement, as a Pirandellian work, a performance within a performance. George is the player and the scripter of the games he orchestrates like 'Hump the Hostess' and 'Get the Guests'. George and Martha partly entertain the guests Nick and Honey with language games, often cruel, for their own theatrical purpose. Also as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> Matthhew Roudane 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Toward the marrow', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, pp. 39-58.



in Pirandello's *Six Characters in search of an Author* Roudane finds that the play's bold and aggressive language invites the audience to break down or at least minimize the barrier between the play and themselves, thus creating a closer experience between public and actors.

Particularly significant amongst the critical studies of Martin Walser's *Die Zimmerschlacht* is Anthony Waine's comprehensive analysis, *Martin Walser. The Development as Dramatist 1950-1970*. To give an indication of the focus of his study, I would like to highlight here two different aspects of his interpretation of *Die Zimmerschlacht* which emphasise the relationship between the personal and the social, something which tends to be more explicitly addressed in Walser's work than it is in Albee's. Based on an analysis of the interaction of the characters, Waine's study makes clear that they are under pressure to meet the demands of the wider macrocosm of the society in which they live. Felix's intention to boycott his friend Benno's party because the latter has a twenty-four year old girlfriend is rooted in his anxiety that his failure to fit into this social scenario will be exposed. The attempt to detach from these social demands by staging an erotic evening at home with Trude gradually collapses into a fierce battle and shows how the couple are forced to admit that they cannot function as a unit.<sup>24</sup> Waine shows how during the fierce domestic battle which accounts for a considerable part of the text, language is structured according to stylized speech rhythms in the form of syllabic symmetry, repetition and variation of sentences that are common to poetic style. Significant for the understanding of the play are the parallels with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Both plays show a

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<sup>24</sup> Anthony E. Waine, *Martin Walser. The Development as Dramatist 1950 - 1970*. (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), pp.225-45 .

minimum of dramatic action and, like Vladimir and Estragon who spend the time on artificial arguments and games, Felix and Trude in a less extreme way, focus on games and arguments which revolve around whether to go or not to go to Benno's party.

Also with reference to *Die Zimmerschlacht*, Gerald A. Fetz similarly notes that what initially appears as a marriage drama gradually reveals the interdependence of private and social worlds as well as the disruptive effect of social competition on the characters. Reference is made to Felix's disproportionate rebellion against Benno and the failed attempt of the couple to use role-play to create an erotic evening for themselves which ends in mutual insults and ultimately with the insight that they have to comply with social expectations. The critic finds that, as in many of Walser's works, the deadlock with which the play begins is reinstated at the end. In his analysis of *Ein fliehendes Pferd*<sup>25</sup> Fetz deals with the way in which the two central characters pursue their own strategies in ways that will inevitably lead to conflict. Helmut, as a master of appearance and simulation, does not want to be carried away by the influence of his hyperactive former school friend, Klaus. Both of their interactive strategies show rifts that will gradually expose their fears and dependencies. Fetz summarizes three main concerns that have exercised commentators on this play in relation to Walser's other dramas. On the one hand there are those who agree with Marcel Reich-Ranicki, praising Walser's clearly comprehensible language and straight-forward action, and, on the other, there are those who miss the less direct

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<sup>25</sup> The play *Ein fliehendes Pferd* is an adaptation based on the novella of the same name. Criticism has frequently considered the novella but I have found no substantial criticism of the play. As the problems of the play and the novella are equally consistent, I shall refer to critical approaches of the novella. I refer in this connection to point 5.2.2 of this thesis 'Group Dynamics and Communication' where I address the issue on how the dramatic interpretation deals with the action of the novella.

dramatic structure of the plays before *Ein fliehendes Pferd* which Joachim Kaiser defines as a ‘tausendmal anfechtbaren, tausendmal herrlicheren Seelen – und Wort – Dschungel’.<sup>26</sup> The second question that divides critics is whether Walser’s preoccupation with the existential and psychological in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* and other later works has allowed him to give enough consideration to the influence of social and political contexts and the third, which relates to this, is whether the ending of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* is to be seen as a further escape for Helmut and therefore indicative of hopelessness or, more positively, as an attempt to give in to the longing for mutual understanding.<sup>27</sup>

Several commentators on this work have compared Helmut’s and Klaus’s behaviour with that of a fleeing horse – *Ein fliehendes Pferd* – that provides the title of the novella and which Margit M. Sinka’s study *The Flight Motif in Martin Walser’s ‘Ein fliehendes Pferd’* considers significant to the meaning of the text. The passage in the novella (pp. 88-91) where Klaus is able to stop a run away horse declaring ‘[...] einem fliehenden Pferd kannst Du dich nicht in den Weg stellen’, something with which Helmut agrees wholeheartedly, ‘das stimmt rief er und wie das stimmt’, is picked up in the play when Helmut announces to Sabine that he would like to make clear to Klaus his intention to flee: ‘Ja, ich fliehe. Wer sich mir in den Weg stellt . . . ich will mich nicht aussprechen.’<sup>28</sup> According to Sinka’s interpretation, in which she further expands on the motif of flight and its implications for the development of the novella, both men try to escape, Helmut by turning increasingly inwards and Klaus by escaping from the limitations of his

<sup>26</sup> Joachim Kaiser, ‘Martin Walser’s *Blindes Glanzstück: Funktion und Funktionieren der Novelle “Ein fliehendes Pferd”*’, *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken*, 32, Heft 363 (1978) 828-38 as quoted by Gerald A. Fetz *Martin Walser* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> Gerald A. Fetz, pp. 118-123.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Walser, *Ein fliehendes Pferd, Novelle*, pp. 88-89.

own self in the attempt to satisfy social demands.<sup>29</sup> A study by Saskia Dams, *Martin Walser 'Ein fliehendes Pferd'. Das Leitmotiv des Pferdes und seine Textbezüge zur Flucht*, similarly sees flight as a key motif which can be followed through the utterances of the characters in the text providing an insight into who flees where and why they do so.<sup>30</sup>

The above critical perspectives have made valuable contributions to the understanding of the works to be examined here and have been influential for my own study. I will demonstrate here that an investigation based on insights from pragmatics can shed an alternative and more penetrating light than has been provided so far on how and why speakers communicate in a certain way, thus giving a clear picture of what it is that the characters are communicating to each other and, beyond that, what the plays are communicating to the audiences. This is especially significant for Albee's and Walser's works since, as has already been stated, the meaning of the plays is not revealed through action but language. I will make clear from my analysis that looking at the dynamics of interaction with reference to pragmatic concepts will make a significant contribution to the understanding of Albee's and Walser's works.

I shall elaborate on common concerns in Albee's and Walser's works through cross-references during the analysis of the plays as well as in the conclusion of this investigation. Similarities between them also highlight the shared context of the time in which the plays were created. As has already been stated, a general exploration of human communication during the post-war period took shape

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<sup>29</sup> Margit M. Sinka, 'The Flight Motif in Martin Walser's *Ein fliehendes Pferd*', *Monatshefte*, Vol.74, No 1 (1982), 47-58.

<sup>30</sup> Saskia Dams, *Martin Walser 'Ein fliehendes Pferd'. Das Leitmotiv des Pferdes und seine Textbezüge zur Flucht* (Norderstedt: GRIN, 2003).

against the backdrop of emancipatory movements of which the civil rights movement in the United States, feminism, the anti-psychiatry movements and student and worker revolts of the 60s were the most significant. To some extent at least, this revolutionary backdrop is reflected in the plays themselves. So, for instance, in this respect Anna Maria Stenz refers suggestively to the idealism of the Intern, a protagonist of Albee's *Death of Bessie Smith*:<sup>31</sup> 'His interest in people is more clearly and realistically focused now, he may very well become one of the activists who pave the way for the civil rights movements of the 1960s'.<sup>32</sup>

The evolution in the study of human communication during the 1960s and 1970s which accompanied the significant cultural shifts in the way individuals saw themselves is of vital importance to my approach to the plays. My own study repeatedly points to the pertinence of analyzing communicational strategies in dramatic works by means of the tools provided by linguistic pragmatics. Its foremost concern lies in the organization and application of instruments provided by different theories of pragmatics employed in relation to dramatic works within the limits of literary criticism. Neither linguistic nor historical research can be exhaustively pursued in this framework. It seems however fitting to point out, as I have done above, that the fundamental concerns of pragmatics manifested within a specific context correspond in different ways to the historical and cultural frameworks of the particular period in which the plays analyzed here were created.

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<sup>31</sup> *The Death of Bessie Smith* is Albee's only openly political play: He juxtaposes the characters of the nurse in a hospital who does not want to admit the critically ill Bessie Smith who is black and the intern who is prepared to treat her.

<sup>32</sup> Ana Maria Stenz, p.22.

Marshall McLuhan's statement 'the medium is the message' which is at the heart of his work *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*<sup>33</sup> was emblematic of a period which put the study of communication, particularly mass and media communication, at the centre of much research and analysis. There is of course a definite distinction to be made between mass communication and face-to-face human communication, the latter being the focus of interest of the theories referred to in my thesis. However, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was much preoccupied with the means by which media manipulates and controls the individual. McLuhan expresses the conviction that the context in which a message is communicated is as significant as the content of the message. The same assumption can be made about individual communication in relation to its context. Such context is partly but importantly defined by messages created, perpetuated and exploited by the media. By contextualising communicational strategies in individual interaction, pragmatic theories prove useful in understanding how individuals attempt to negotiate the implications of their expressions which are largely determined by a context shaped by forces beyond their own control. This is a concern shared by the dramatic authors I analyze as they portray human relationships.

In the context of this study I shall also be referring to the work of Erving Goffman whose sociological approach explores the workings of communication in society.<sup>34</sup> Goffman was one of the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century. In his book *Interactional Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behaviour*

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<sup>33</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (New-York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

<sup>34</sup> E. Goffman *Interactional Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behaviour* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1967).

which appeared in 1967,<sup>35</sup> Goffman analyses extensively the many variations in human behaviour and reactions on which a large number of the pragmatic concepts in my investigations are based. Goffman regards human interaction as a series of performances. The two different but interrelated notions of performance on a stage and performance as a measure of exploitable achievement point to the relevance of the study of communication strategies in understanding the way a modern capitalist society functions in everyday life and also emphasises the pertinence of applying linguistic pragmatics theories to dramatic dialogue.

Goffman's belief that participants in social interactions are engaged in certain practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others is not dissimilar to Brown and Levinson's explanation of Face Threatening Acts that are based on the avoidance or the employment of certain strategies to minimize the threat to hearer and speaker.<sup>36</sup> I regard Goffman's work as specially useful for my study due to its interest in relating everyday speech to dramatic interaction. I will refer briefly to Goffman's first and most famous work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*<sup>37</sup> listed by the 'International Sociological Association' in 1998 as one of the ten most important books of the 20th century. It was the first book to treat face-to-face interaction as a subject of sociological study. In this work Goffman treats face-to-face interactions as theatrical performances, connecting the kinds of acts that people carry out in their daily lives to the analysis of drama. A major theme which Goffman treats throughout his work as of fundamental importance for the participants of an interaction is the definition of a situation. Such a definition

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<sup>35</sup> The impact of Goffman's work on the theories of subsequently published pragmatic linguistics on which I based my analysis of plays is acknowledged by Brown and Levinson in their work *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* that they have dedicated to his memory.

<sup>36</sup> See Brown and Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*, pp. 65-84.

<sup>37</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City NY : Doubleday 1959)

gives an interaction coherence but actors also attempt to define it in a way that reflects well upon themselves and encourages others to accept it. Here Watzlawick's axiom 'The Punctuation of the Sequence of Events' (see my elaborations in section 4.3.1.1. point 3) comes to mind which, in a similar manner, explains how interactants' attempts to impose their own definition of a situation can lead to disturbances and eventual conflicts.

With their often intense focus on human communication, dramatic works are in a position to allow insight into the complex relationship between social context and individual interaction in ways that can be politically significant. In relation to this Jürgen Magenau in his biography on Martin Walser writes 'Wenn draußen permanenter Stillstand herrscht, verlangt das Publikum zu Recht, daß die Welt wenigstens auf der Bühne verändert wird!'<sup>38</sup> Significantly, Walser himself also refers to the ways in which literary works can engage in potentially revolutionary ways with reality making references to the dialectics between sociology and literature: 'Soziologische Werke sind Romane die von der Wirklichkeit diktiert sind. Romane sind soziologische Werke, die im Widerspruch gegen die Wirklichkeit entstehen'<sup>39</sup>. Sociology reflects the existing conditions but literature must have the critical ability to deal with the existing circumstances. Even if the plays analysed here, premiered in the 60s and 80s, are part of a tendency to concentrate on individuals and their relationship to each other, rather than on explicitly political subject matter, both Albee and Walser refuse to see their plays as unpolitical. While not confronting political problems directly, they point to the influence of social circumstances on the action. Walser himself has

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<sup>38</sup> J. Magenau, p. 253.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 322.



described his plays from this period as ‘Bewußtseinstheater’. Assessing this shift in focus positively, of his greatly praised novel *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, published in 1978 and adapted into a play in 1985, the well known critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki declared ‘daß Walser endlich nicht mehr das Bedürfnis hat die Welt zu verändern’ (compare section 2.2.5), perhaps missing the point that this new interest in the apparently private worlds of individuals did not necessarily mean a failure to recognize the impact of politics on the private or a lack of desire to see those worlds change. Albee’s plays have almost exclusively treated communication on a one-to-one level (with the exception perhaps of *The Death of Bessie Smith*, see Stenz’s remark on p. 28 of this section). *The Zoo Story* represents a foretaste of what would remain a central concern in most of Albee’s later plays, a criticism of alienated American values placed in the context of a drive for communication which Albee sees as central to a reconstruction of the values of a moral world. Albee would have agreed with the philosopher Karl Jaspers who in his work *Man in the Modern Age* emphasized the significance of communication, stating that man must ‘[...] through communication, establish the tie between self and self...and in default of this life will be utterly despiritualised and become mere function’.<sup>40</sup>

The reason why pragmatics offers such a helpful way into the work of these two writers in particular, although not only them, is that by contextualising language, and more specifically speech acts, it participates in an interdisciplinary preoccupation with the understanding of how externally determined power structures are interiorised and in this way illuminates concerns which are central

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<sup>40</sup> Karl Jaspers ‘Man in the Modern Age’ translated by E. Paul and C. Paul, London 1959, pp.176-94 as quoted by Bigsby, C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama Volume 2: Williams, Miller, Albee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 276-77.

to the plays of both Walser and Albee, but which also engaged their contemporaries working in many different fields. Language and language behaviour as primary objects of research represent a shared basis for disciplines which strongly shaped views in the 1950s through to the 1980s and 90s. Psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, sociology, anthropology, linguistics and communication sciences both brought about and benefited from a shift from meaning to context analysis. In her study *Pragmatics, a Multidisciplinary Perspective* Louise Cummings refers to Jürgen Habermas as looking to pragmatics and particularly to a speech act analysis of language to achieve a social-theoretical goal, ‘a form of life free from unnecessary domination in all its forms’.<sup>41</sup> I believe it is safe to say that the authors I study share this concern with inspiring the audience towards an active and possibly liberating understanding of their own existence, allowing for the possibility that such an understanding could bring about social change. Their plays were written in a historical context marked by a movement towards individual emancipation and my analysis will show how they can be seen as part of that broader project.

In my study I will proceed methodologically as follows. Before moving on to a detailed examination and critique of the main theoretical works with which I will engage, I will set out in more depth the reasons for the choice of these pragmatic linguistic studies for the analysis of the plays in question. This will be followed by a more detailed overview of the origins of pragmatics and the development of literary pragmatics. The assessment of the different theories concludes with an elucidation of the reasons for applying concepts developed in

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<sup>41</sup> Louise Cummings *Pragmatics: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

relation to ordinary language to literary works in general and drama in particular.

The linguistic pragmatics devices elucidated in the theoretical sections will provide the framework for the analysis of the dramatic dialogue through a detailed study which will illuminate the kinds of meanings a pragmatic approach can unlock.

In its concentration mainly on the dialogic aspect of the plays at hand this study does not lay claim to being an exhaustive analysis of dramatic interaction nor does it reject other kinds of interpretation. I shall attempt, however, to demonstrate how methods and findings from pragmatics provide significant insight into how and why characters communicate in a certain way, what motivates their communicational attitudes and how audiences understand those communications.

## 2 Preliminary Theoretical and Methodological Remarks

Both Martin Walser and Edward Albee place great emphasis on the role of language in their plays. The action moves within fast, detailed verbal interchanges and the plays rely more on communicational complexity than on the development of a strong plot. Lack of identity, alienation and the resulting conflict between individual and society are characteristic themes of post-war European literature and particularly of modern drama. By questioning human relationships, highlighting disturbances in communication and suggesting ways of overcoming these problems, both Edward Albee and Martin Walser deal with a topical subject, as my introduction has suggested. The plays have been selected with a view to exploring characteristic problems of communication between individuals within a circumscribed social group. Notwithstanding the fact that Albee and Walser write from within specific cultural contexts, a common denominator can be found for many aspects of their work. By sketching out the reasons for analysing and comparing the plays in question an attempt is made to show how the authors are able to transcend their local experience, addressing universal or at least Western concerns. Both authors criticise the way in which individual behaviour is culturally and socially determined and demonstrate its effect on social relationships. Albee deplores the loss of human qualities like solidarity and empathy and, since writing his first publically acknowledged play *The Zoo Story*, he has shown again and again his concern with the alienation caused by the 'American Dream', 'the great symbol of American values'.<sup>42</sup> Through the

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<sup>42</sup> C.W. Bigsby, *Edward Albee. Writers and Critics* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 31.

medium of the family Albee unmasks the original ideas of progress, success, freedom, individual independence and the pursuit of happiness which have become increasingly perverted giving way more and more to a selfish pursuit of possession and status.

For Walser the economic miracle had helped to alienate the individual from true human values and led to unquestioned acceptance of what he sees as the norms of a self-concerned, egotistical society. In the 1950s Walser's work was, like that of other contemporary German writers, directed towards coming to terms with the after-effects of the atrocities committed during the Nazi period. Political parables like *Eiche und Angora* and *Überlebensgroß Herr Krott* deal with the flaws of society and the inability of individuals to cope with reality.<sup>43</sup> In his later works, of which the plays analysed below are examples, social and private values are seen to clash.

The characters in Walser's *Ein fliehendes Pferd* and *Die Zimmerschlacht* as well as in Albee's *A Delicate Balance* are linguistically skilled and come from a solid economic background. In all three plays the appearance of outsiders threatens the apparent order of a homogenised existence that has been reduced to mere routine. Conflicting demands created through the disturbing influence of the outsiders are negotiated through language, which, during the development of the plays, changes from conviviality to, albeit at times through ambiguous strategies, aggressive speech. Words are substituted for human substance, they become means of concealment and self-deception. In none of the plays do the characters go beyond perceiving the possibility of a change of attitude, as they are unable to

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<sup>43</sup> See 'Eiche und Angora' and 'Überlebensgroß Herr Krott' in *Martin Walser: Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 53-113 and 155-214 respectively.

break out of their social and individual determinism. Rather than having a synthesis the plays remain unresolved and present an open question.

The detailed analysis of the plays in the light of the theoretical perspectives of pragmatic linguistics will show what strategies the authors provide their characters with to express their concerns. While the works that constitute the theoretical frame for the analysis of the plays in question will be explored fully in the course of this study, for the moment I merely want to set out briefly by way of illustration the reasons for referring to them.

From the detailed exploration of the various pragmatic studies a framework is established to examine the complexity of dramatic interaction which one work alone could not provide. Leech's as well as Brown and Levinson's works concentrate more on specific pragmatic linguistic utterances and their effect on the addressee whereas Watzlawick looks at the organization of on-going interaction. Leech's and Brown and Levinson's pragmatic models of communication offer alternative strategies to explain how illocutionary goals are conveyed. Comparing them allows for different possible ways of gaining insight into the particular characteristics of the dramatic texts to be analysed. The dynamic quality of Leech's model will be of significance for the analysis of the plays in question since it offers a wide range of strategies for exploring something that is clearly a concern of both authors. Manoeuvring for social power and self-assertion takes place in all three plays and in order to demonstrate their unwillingness to empathise with each other, the characters often resort to opposing communicative strategies. The wide range of strategies that are at work alongside the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle provide an example of the way in which Leech's model can be useful for the analysis of the

plays. Thus banter (overfamiliarity) is countered with irony (distance and superiority), hyperboli (overstatement) is disqualified through litotes (understatement) and metacommunication instead of acting as a stabilizer only proves how differently each individual character views the interaction.

Brown and Levinson's work *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* equates politeness with the mutual awareness of face sensitivity that forms part of most interactions, while the possibility of face threatening acts, FTAs as they are referred to, is present in most talk exchanges and must be counteracted through redressive strategies, with modifications and additions to indicate that no such threat is intended. The threat to face esteem is minimized through two basic notions described as Positive Politeness that expresses solidarity and aims at minimizing social distance and Negative Politeness that is marked by restraint and by conventional indirectness. For the analysis of the plays Negative and Positive Politeness provide a number of strategies to distinguish authentic forms of communication from superficial and conventional avoidance strategies. Brown and Levinson's work is especially significant for the analysis of *A Delicate Balance* where overconventional language becomes a means of concealing deeply ingrained conflicts.

While Leech as well as Brown and Levinson analyse mainly isolated linguistic structures, Watzlawick concentrates on patterns of interactional behaviour within a broader sociologically and psychologically oriented application of pragmatic principles. Watzlawick's theory is based on the interplay of the basic principles on which communication is built, which he calls Axioms of Human Communication and on the organisation of ongoing interaction. He first defines these axioms explaining how and with what interactional consequences

they can be distorted. After defining the patterns of communication on which his theory is based, Watzlawick looks at the organization of human interaction, identifying the different strategies that lead to disturbances in interactional behaviour. When exploring the organization of human interaction Watzlawick explains how the behaviour of an individual takes on a completely new dimension when seen in the context of ongoing relationships.

Watzlawick's examination of the potential disturbances implied in human communication is significant for this research project since all three plays are concerned with the conflicts resulting from the behavioural attitudes of the characters. Power struggles, the determination of the players to hold onto their own position, lack of empathy, the unwillingness to face reality and to alter established patterns of behaviour are conducive to complex dramatic situations which Watzlawick's theoretical frame helps to clarify.

These brief considerations on how pragmatic issues are significant for the understanding of dramatic dialogue that focuses on human communication will be addressed in detail in section 4. As my introduction has shown and as this thesis as a whole will also demonstrate, communication and the problems associated with it is a recurring theme in the literature of the second half of the twentieth-century and the early twenty-first century, as well as in other disciplinary areas. There is, however, no objective reason to exclude works from other periods and indeed classical plays from the field of studies that uses methods of linguistic pragmatics. I would like to refer at this point to some criticism of modern works that demonstrate the usefulness of a pragmatic analysis.

Having much in common with my own work, I consider Susan Mandala's *Twentieth Century Drama Dialogue as Ordinary Talk. Speaking between the*



*Lines* as a significant example of the pragmatic analysis of drama. She investigates and tries to reconcile and criticize the work of linguists and literary critics. As in the present study, Mandala considers how dramatic dialogue works when analysed with the pragmatic norms applied to ordinary conversation.<sup>44</sup> In her analysis of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* Mandala sheds light on how unusual situations and combinations of relationship that are characteristic of Pinter's subject matter in many of his plays are presented in the dialogue through ordinary language. Readers and viewers are asked to confront and make sense of how conversations that appear normal seem nevertheless to represent strange reactions to the situations at hand. Issues that appear to be particularly salient in Mandala's investigation are the unsettling combination of the usual and the strange, the disturbing configuration of relationships and the struggle for power within these relationships. Positive Politeness contrasts sharply with bald on record strategies, elicitation, the process of making the other react in a certain way, requestives in the form of indirect illocutions and challenges are all verbally manipulated in order to secure power.

In the analysis of Arnold Wesker's play *Roots*, Mandala considers the significance of Brown and Levinson's explanations of Positive Politeness in a way that also takes into account Wesker's ear for the vernacular. Interaction particularly rich in Positive Politeness devices such as repetitions, matching assessments, intensifying interest, in-group address forms, as outlined by Brown

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<sup>44</sup> Susan Mandala, *Twentieth-Century Drama Dialogue as Ordinary Talk. Speaking between the Lines*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Mandala's study refers to the following works: Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), Arnold Wesker, 'Roots' in *The Wesker Trilogy* (Harmodsworth: Penguin, 1959), Terence Rattigan, *In Praise of Love* (London: Samuel French, 1973).

and Levinson, are shown to be instrumental in establishing interpersonal involvement.

In her analysis of Terence Rattigan's *In Praise of Love* Mandala is particularly interested in determining a way to understand 'what is not said'. Here she refers to Brown and Levinson's treatment of off-record communication which characterizes the relationship between Sebastian and Lydia, the main characters. Off record statements are either more general, that is they contain less information than required if an unambiguous statement is to be made, or they are different from what is really meant. Sebastian and Lydia make use of off-record utterances in order to protect each other from the truth, they are both aware of Lydia's life-threatening illness but want to keep it secret from each other. On the writer-reader level it is indicated that the continuous use of off-record strategies depends on lies that require the audience to read between the lines. Key pieces of information are conveyed off-record to the audience who are encouraged to question what is made explicit later during the action of the play. Off-record strategies that flout the maxims of quantity and quality at the character-character level are revealed later as the attempt to protect each other from the truth. The pragmatic devices referred to by Mandala are also part of my own analysis albeit with reference to very different scenarios as in the following examples. Off-record strategies are part of Tobias' and Agnes's attitudes in *A Delicate Balance* to avoid a direct response to their friends' request to stay with them indefinitely. Bald-on-record strategies often used to secure power over another person are engaged by Klaus in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* as when he urges Helmut to give up his way of life by sharing and adopting his own more fulfilling emotional existence, or in *Die Zimmerschlacht* and *A Delicate Balance* when the situation comes to a point

where the characters resort to hurling offensive remarks at each other. Positive Politeness strategies are employed in the three plays I have analysed, when the characters want to make amends for their behaviour by showing empathy and understanding for the other.

Pragmatics for literary analysis remains a relatively recent and innovative approach, yielding often compelling results. From a methodological point of view I consider it particularly meaningful that these theories have also been employed to evaluate general patterns of social communication in drama. As an example I refer to the description of gender relationships in Hosni M. El-Daly's study 'A Socio-Pragmatic Account of the Relationship between Language and Power in Male-Female Language: Evidence from Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman"'. El-Daly investigates if and how Miller delineated his characters according to the stylistic variations in male-female interaction. With reference to Brown and Levinson's model of politeness it is made clear that where the female protagonist uses positive strategies of politeness, trying to satisfy the face wants of others, the male protagonist reacts with Negative Politeness, warding off her approach. Violation of Leech's principles of approbation and sympathy by the male protagonist implies power and the right to superiority. The investigation makes clear that gender differentiation in language does not exist in a vacuum but is developed in everyday social practice.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Hosni M. El-Daly, 'A Socio-pragmatic Account of the Relationship between Language and Power in Male-Female Language: Evidence from Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman"', *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 1.1 (2011), pp 62-80, <<http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijel/article/view/9762>> [accessed August 2, 2014]. For a thorough pragmatic investigation of Pinter's work see also Diana-Viorela Ionescu, *A Pragmatic Approach to Pinteresque Drama* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University Cluj Napoca, Romania, 2010.). For evidence that pragmatics is also applicable to classical works, see Randall L. B. McNeill, 'Cum tacent, clamant: The Pragmatics of Silence in Catullus', *Classical Philology*, 105.1 (2010), pp. 69-82,

Having made reference to some significant critical examples of how analysis of everyday communication contributes to the understanding of dramatic interaction, I conclude by mentioning Watzlawick's attempt at showing how his theory of communication works based on the analysis of an extract from Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Watzlawick who considers the play 'even more real than reality' finds that this analysis usefully limits the data available by avoiding endless and recurring repetitions resulting from a description of examples from real life interaction.<sup>46</sup> This will be referred in more detail later in this study.

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<[http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/651253?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/651253?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)> [accessed June 21, 2015].

<sup>46</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick, Chapter 5 'A Communicational Approach to the play "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf"', pp. 149-186. See also my explanations in section 4.3.1.

### 3 Theoretical Premises

#### 3.1 The Development of Pragmatics

An extensive account of how pragmatics, a relatively new discipline, made its way into linguistics would exceed the boundaries of this study. A general overview, on the other hand, will contribute to a better understanding of the theories to be examined in this study, their relationship to developments in the broader social and cultural contexts and their application to the analysis of the plays under discussion.<sup>47</sup> As early as 1938 the philosopher C.W. Morris followed by R. Carnap in 1942 made the distinction between syntax, semantics and pragmatics for the study of semiotics.<sup>48</sup> For Bloomfield and the generation that followed, linguistics meant phonetics and phonemics.<sup>49</sup> It was only in the late 1950s that Chomsky asserted the centrality of syntax although he also disregarded meaning from serious contemplation. In 1971 Lakoff and others, argued that syntax could not be separated from the study of language *use*, thus opening the way for pragmatics.<sup>50</sup> Once meaning had been admitted to a central place in language study it was difficult to ignore how it varies from context to context, which created the need for a new linguistic discipline. Leech notes:

So pragmatics was henceforth on the linguistic map. Its colonisation was only the last stage of a wave-by-wave expansion

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed account of the historical development of Linguistics towards Pragmatics, see G. Leech, pp. 1-18. I refer here only to notions and concepts fundamental to the concerns of this dissertation.

<sup>48</sup> Compare C.W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1938) and R. Carnap *Introduction to Semantics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1942).

<sup>49</sup> Compare N. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).

<sup>50</sup> R. Lakoff, 'The Logic of Politeness; or, minding your p's and q's', in *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1973), pp. 292-305.

of linguistics from a narrow discipline dealing with the physical data of speech, to a broad discipline taking in form, meaning, and context.<sup>51</sup>

The contribution of philosophy was important for the development of pragmatics. Of lasting influence were Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) who established how verbal acts that take place in particular situations constitute a form of action rather than being simply a matter of saying something about the world.<sup>52</sup> Austin concluded that in all utterances (whether they have a performative verb or not) there is both a *doing* element and a *saying* element. This led him to shift to a distinction between locutionary act (roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference) and illocutionary act (utterances which have a certain communicative force and purpose) and to supplement these categories with the further category of perlocutionary act (what we bring about or achieve *by saying* something). The locutionary and the perlocutionary act can be largely discounted in pragmatics. The illocutionary act which refers to what the speaker is *doing* as opposed to *saying in* an utterance, that is, what he intends the hearer to recognise as his purpose in saying something, is largely at the centre of pragmatics.

The greatest attention in speech act theory has been focused on the illocutionary act to the point that in pragmatics the term speech act is frequently interchangeable with illocutionary act or illocution to express the force or communicative function of an utterance. Linguists such as Leech and also

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<sup>51</sup> G. Leech, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Compare J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962) and J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

Goffman in his more socially oriented work, *Forms of Talk*, argue that the effects of perlocutionary acts are not directly observable and therefore not properly part of pragmatics.<sup>53</sup>

Other philosophers, most notably Grice (1975)<sup>54</sup> have developed and extended Austin's and Searle's arguments and drawn attention to the manner in which the uttering of statements is governed by rules and conventions which have to be understood and abided by. Grice's elaborations on the Cooperative Principle and its maxims explain how speakers often mean more than they say, an explanation made by means of pragmatic implications which he calls conversational implicatures. Grice's work constitutes a significant contribution to the development of pragmatics.

Pragmatics' concern with the meaning of utterances that comes from the contextual and interpersonal situation between speaker and listener shows a certain reaction against Saussure's and Chomsky's treatment of language as an abstract device disassociable from its users and its functions. In 1983 Levinson states:

Another powerful and general motivation for the interest in pragmatics is the growing realisation that there is a very substantial gap between current linguistic theories of language and accounts of linguistic communication [...] For it is becoming increasingly clear that a semantic theory alone can give us only a proportion,

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<sup>53</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 203. See also E. Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 12. Goffman posits as a basic normative assumption about talk that it should be correctly interpretable in the sense of conveying to the intended recipients what the sender more or less wanted to get across. The issue according to Goffman is not that the recipients should agree *with* what they have heard but only agree with the speaker as *to* what they have heard. 'In Austinian terms' – says Goffman – 'illocutionary force is at stake not perlocutionary force' (Ibid). On the perlocutionary act however, it is reasonable to assume that illocutions are exploited for perlocutionary effect as for instance in rethoric, literary texts or even in every day discourse.

<sup>54</sup> Compare H. P. Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, ed. by P. Cole and J. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41-58.

and perhaps only a small if essential proportion of a general account of language understanding.<sup>55</sup>

Deriving from these general assumptions, several approaches to the contextual analysis of meaning have evolved. Today it is difficult to speak of a unified understanding of pragmatics but certain common denominators fundamental to the theory should be noted. Virtually all linguists make the distinction between utterance and sentence, taking the view that the form of sentences in language is determined by syntactic and semantic rules. Sentences are defined purely as expressions in a given language divorced from particular situations, speakers or hearers. Utterances by contrast, are determined by the contextual and interpersonal situation. According to Wale's definition, an utterance 'can usefully be seen as the physical realisation of a sentence in either spoken or written form. In other words, it belongs to language in use rather than language as a system'.<sup>56</sup> In the preface of her translation of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Emerson gives an account of the difference between utterance and sentence:

[...] a sentence is a unit of language, while an utterance is a unit of communication. Sentences are relatively complete thoughts existing within a single speaker's speech, and the pauses between them are 'grammatical,' (*sic*) matters of punctuation. Utterances on the other hand, are impulses, and cannot be so normatively transcribed; their boundaries are marked only by a change of speech subject.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> S.C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> K. Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (Harlow: Longman, 1989), p. 471.

<sup>57</sup> C. Emerson 'Preface to M. M. Bakhtin 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics' (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.xxxiv, as quoted by J. Hawthorne, *A Concise Glossary of Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 195.



Pragmatic Principles are based on utterances, not sentences which amounts to a claim that they are regulative rather than constitutive, since conversational utterances are seldom clearly defined. Some utterances can be highly ambivalent in that they imply more than what they express verbally and it is not unusual for one illocution to be intended to fulfil a number of goals. Utterances are often negotiable: by leaving the force of an illocution unclear the speaker may give the hearer the opportunity to choose between one force or the other, leaving at least partially the responsibility of the meaning to the hearer.<sup>58</sup>

It has been mentioned already that the verbal content of the sender-receiver message exchanges is often of less importance than the relation established through communication. Accordingly speech acts need not be treated as discreet and mutually exclusive categories but can be extended to the study of connected discourse. The personal goals of the interactants can be negotiated towards possible outcomes. Leech differentiates between what he sees as dynamic and standing features of communication: some features remain stable over fairly long stretches such as the social distance between the participants and others, such as the kind of illocutionary demand the speaker is making on the hearer (request, advice, command, etc.), tend to undergo continuing change and modification during discourse. Standing features interact with dynamic features and it is not always easy to separate these two types of condition as, for instance, the degree of politeness between interactants may vary according to the illocutionary force of an individual utterance.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Compare G.Leech, p. 8 and pp. 22-23.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

The present research project understands pragmatics primarily as the study of linguistic expressions and their function in a context but also as the study of action in language undertaken with the intention of causing the addressee to reassess his view of how things are, including his system of values and his view of the speaker's beliefs and intentions. The reading of the pragmatic linguistic theories explored in this research will clarify the reasons for this approach.

### **3.2 The Pragmatic Approach in Literary Conversation**

The above section gives an abbreviated account of the development of pragmatics and outlines roughly its linguistic characteristics. How conversation is typically structured, the distribution of roles in interaction and what sociocultural factors motivate these structures and distributions will be extensively dealt with in the account of the different pragmatic theories in section four and the findings that will then be brought to bear on the analysis of the plays investigated in section five. After examining the different pragmatic theories a detailed explanation will be given of their significance for an understanding of literature in general and dramatic language in particular and this will be followed by an investigation of how the theory works for the interaction between characters as well as its effect on writer-reader communication. Since the differences between dramatic and every day conversation will be elaborated on extensively in these sections, at this point it should just be said that, when playwrights represent talk in dialogue, the application of pragmatic theories offers a useful means to analyse the structures and distributions of communication that are presented and exploited by the writers of plays. It is reasonable to suggest, however, that playwrights themselves do not think of linguistic structures when writing dialogues but proceed more intuitively.

‘Playwrights’ – states Susan Mandala – ‘proceed more organically [...] drawing subconsciously on their communicative competence when they write dialogues’.<sup>60</sup>

Mandala refers to Spencer’s guidebook for would-be playwrights that presents discussions of dramatic structures like conflicts and emotional states but less clearly discussions of linguistic structures.<sup>61</sup> However, I agree with Mandala that neither playwrights nor audience need explicit linguistic knowledge of conversation to write or to be affected by dramatic dialogue but that analysts’ and critics’ knowledge of the structure of language will certainly help to present a clear view of how language functions in drama. An investigation of the ways in which the language of drama is thought to work will be undertaken in the sections that follow.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Susan Mandala, p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. See also S. Spencer, *The Playwright’s Guidebook* (New York and London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Compare *ibid.* p. 36.

## 4 Pragmatic Theories

In the following, the theories on which the formal analysis of the plays are based will be outlined and examined for their usefulness in relation to dramatic dialogue, namely Leech's *The Principles of Pragmatics*, Brown and Levinson's *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* and Watzlawick's *Pragmatics of Human Communication*.

### 4.1 Leech's Conversational Principles<sup>63</sup>

Leech has established a series of conversational principles which prove significant for an examination of the interaction in the plays to be analysed in this project. An extensive account of Leech's treatment of pragmatics would not be in keeping with this study's focus on pragmatic theory in relation to literary texts. Some methodological preliminaries preceding the description of Leech's conversational principles will, however, contribute to a better understanding of his approach.

Leech roughly defines Pragmatics as the study of meaning in relation to speech situations, distinguishing it thereby from semantics where meaning is defined purely as a property of expressions in a given language, in isolation from particular situations, speakers or hearers. Leech does not deny the validity of grammar and semantics *as* abstract formal systems but argues for a complementary view of pragmatics (the principles of language use) and grammar within linguistics since language cannot be understood without studying the interrelations and interactions of the two. This amounts to an affirmation of the

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<sup>63</sup> See G. Leech, *The Principles of Pragmatics* (Harlow: Longman, 1983).

importance of formal linguistics in the sense of Chomsky's 'competence' but with a recognition that it must be fitted into a comprehensive framework combining functional and formal explanations for the way language works. A formal theory provides an account of our linguistic knowledge in the form of a set of rules determining language representations at different levels. Pragmatics on the other hand is a set of strategies and principles for achieving success in communication that imposes weaker constraints on language than grammatical rules as they can according to Leech 'only be predictive in a probabilistic sense'.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Pragmatics answers the question 'Why?' in a way that goes beyond the goals of formal grammatical theories. It explains 'that X occurs rather than Y because X is more in accord with the way language functions as a communicative system'.<sup>65</sup>

Leech approaches Pragmatics from the point of view of rhetorics. While rhetorics traditionally refers to the study of using language skilfully for persuasion in public speaking or for literary expression, Leech concentrates primarily on the effective use of language in everyday conversation and only secondarily on more prepared and public uses of language. The main point about rhetorics in this context is the focus placed on a goal-oriented speech situation, where a speaker uses language to produce a particular effect in the mind of a hearer. The problem the speaker has to solve is as follows:

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<sup>64</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Given that I want to bring about such and such a result in the hearer's consciousness, what is the best way to accomplish this aim by using language?<sup>66</sup>

Based on a distinction familiar from the work of Halliday, Leech differentiates between Interpersonal and Textual Rhetorics.<sup>67</sup> Each of these *consists* of a set of principles which in turn consists of a set of maxims. The textual function determines the stylistic form of a written or spoken text and refers mainly to the task of decoding a message from a stylistic point of view. A well-constructed utterance facilitates this task with respect to the hearer who may feel entitled to expect the speaker to place the segments of an utterance in the right order, giving the proper degree of prominence and subordination to the different parts of a sentence. Leech views the interpersonal function as the expression of one's attitudes and the influence of these attitudes on the hearer. For the analysis of dramatic interaction the interpersonal function takes priority over the textual function which will only be referred to marginally since it is more concerned with the syntactic structure of a sentence.

Rhetorical principles are, according to Leech, the strategies a speaker develops in order to achieve his goal, they constrain communicative behaviour in various ways but are not the main motive for talking. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the illocutionary force of an utterance, i.e., what the speaker wants to communicate, on the one hand, and the strategies he develops to achieve what he wants to convey on the other.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Preface, p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> M.A.K. Halliday, 'Clause types and structural functions' in J. Lyons, ed. *New Horizons in Linguistics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 140-65, as quoted by G. Leech, p. 65.

### 4.1.1 Principles and Maxims

Leech argues in favour of the study of pragmatics by means of the analysis of conversational principles and their maxims based on Grice's notion of a Cooperative Principle (CP)<sup>68</sup> to which Leech adds the Politeness Principle (PP)<sup>69</sup> and its maxims<sup>70</sup> as well as other concepts which Leech calls higher-order principles.<sup>71</sup> Leech does not make a strict distinction between principles and maxims and maintains, after Grice's usage of the term, that the latter are 'simply a manifestation of the former'.<sup>72</sup>

In his influential article 'Logic and Conversation', Grice defines the CP as 'a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged'.<sup>73</sup> The CP<sup>74</sup> is the most important starting point for Leech's work. In relation to this principle Grice distinguished four categories of maxims:

*Quantity*: Give the right amount of information: i. e.,

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

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<sup>68</sup> The Cooperative Principle will in section 4 (Pragmatic Theories) and ulterior sections be abbreviated CP.

<sup>69</sup> The Politeness Principle will in section 4 (Pragmatic Theories) and ulterior sections be abbreviated PP.

<sup>70</sup> According to Leech, Grice himself acknowledges the importance of politeness as a factor in the account of interactional meaning. See G. Leech, footnote 10, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Compare section 4.1.3 of this study.

<sup>72</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> H. P. Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in *Syntax and Semantics*.

<sup>74</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 8.

*Quality:* Try to make your contribution one that is true: i. e.,

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

*Relation:* Be relevant

*Manner:* Be perspicuous; i. e.,

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

The CP enables each participant in a conversation to communicate on the assumption that the other participant is being cooperative. According to Leech however, the CP in itself cannot explain why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean. It is the role of the PP to maintain the social equilibrium and to ensure that the interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place. Leech sees both the CP and the PP as largely regulative factors that complement each other. The CP has the role of regulating what we say so that it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discursive goal(s) while the PP accounts for the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to ensure that conversations will not follow a disruptive path.

The PP and its maxims are as follows:

Maxims of the PP<sup>75</sup>

1. *TACT*: (a) Minimise cost to other.

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<sup>75</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 16.



(b) Maximise benefit to other.

2. *GENEROSITY*: (a) Minimise benefit to self.

(b) Maximise cost to self.

3. *APPROBATION*: (a) Minimise dispraise of other.

(b) Maximise praise of other.

4. *AGREEMENT*: (a) Minimise disagreement between self and other.

(b) Maximise agreement between self and other.

5. *SYMPATHY*: (a) Minimise antipathy between self and other.

(b) Maximise sympathy between self and other.

As Leech himself does not make a clear difference between principles and maxims I will, when analysing the interaction in the plays, work mostly with the PP in general terms directly rather than distinguishing between the individual maxims.<sup>76</sup> Leech points out that there are situations where politeness can take a back seat, for example when speaker and hearer are engaged in a collaborative activity where exchange of information is equally important to both. In other situations the PP can overrule the CP to the extent that the maxims of quality are sacrificed, for instance when in some circumstances people feel justified in telling ‘white lies’. The speaker may for example feel that the only way to decline an invitation politely is by telling a ‘white lie’. An example from *A Delicate Balance*

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

illustrates this point. Instead of openly refusing Edna's suggestion, 'I'm going into town on Thursday, Agnes. Would you like to come?', Agnes prefers to maintain the PP at the cost of what Leech sees as 'a white lie': '(Just a trifle awkward) Well...no, I don't think so Edna; I've so much to do'.<sup>77</sup> Here Agnes feels that the only way of declining an invitation politely is to pretend to have an alternative engagement. These situations which are meant to deceive the hearer should be distinguished from cases that are only 'apparent breaches' of the CP in what Leech calls 'higher order principles' like irony or banter and which exploit the PP in order to uphold at a remote level the CP by allowing the hearer to arrive at the true meaning of the speaker's utterance by way of implicature.

Leech also refers to the unfortunate association of the term politeness with 'nice' but ultimately insincere forms of behaviour making it tempting to see politeness as a trivial and dispensable factor. Leech tries to show otherwise by examining the importance of the PP in relation to other principles (for example the CP and the irony principle). He places the strategies for producing and interpreting polite illocutions on a set of scales of politeness which has a negative and a positive pole. Some illocutions (for example orders) are inherently impolite and others (for example offers) are inherently polite. Negative Politeness therefore consists of minimizing the impoliteness in impolite illocutions, and positive politeness consists of maximizing the politeness in polite illocutions.<sup>78</sup> Leech distinguishes between Relative Politeness and Absolute Politeness. Relative politeness would be some norm of behaviour in a particular setting, the norm may

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<sup>77</sup> Edward Albee, *A Delicate Balance* (New York: Samuel French, 1966), p. 91. Henceforth abbreviated to *DB* and referred to parenthetically in the text with the page number.

<sup>78</sup> The strategies of *Negative* and *Positive Politeness* are central to Brown and Levinson's work. Compare my elaborations on Brown and Levinson p.76 and passim.

be that of a particular culture or language community and it is on the basis of such group norms that people are judged as being polite or impolite. Absolute politeness would refer to those strategies that when placed on a politeness scale as explained above, are inherently impolite or polite.

#### **4.1.2 Some General Properties of the Principles of Pragmatics**

For the formal analysis of communication in the plays under discussion, it would appear useful to outline some of the properties that according to Leech characterise the principles of pragmatics:<sup>79</sup>

- a) Principles/Maxims apply variably to different contexts of language use.
- b) Principles/Maxims apply in variable degrees, rather than in an all-or-nothing way.
- c) Principles/Maxims can conflict with one another.
- d) Principles/Maxims can be contravened without abnegation of the kind of activity which they control.

The last of these statements amounts to a claim that conversational principles and maxims are regulative rather than constitutive. The rules for formal languages count as an integral part of the definition of that language but maxims of this sort do not. Hence if one tells a lie in English one breaks the maxim of quality but this does not mean that one fails to speak the language. In fact, and notoriously, human language can be used to deceive or misinform. The requirement to tell the truth might be regarded as a moral imperative but the reason for including it in a scientific account of language is descriptive rather than prescriptive. The maxims form a necessary part of the description of pragmatic meaning in that they explain

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<sup>79</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 8.

how it is that speakers often ‘mean more than they say’: an explanation which is made by means of pragmatic implications, which Leech – following Grice – calls conversational implicatures.<sup>80</sup> Broadly defined implicatures consist in uttering an illocution whose goal is interpreted as a subsidiary goal for the performance of another illocution. Implicatures may be produced through the deliberate flouting or exploiting of any of the maxims listed above and are understood by the listener to mean that the speaker is presumably not being uncooperative but is reluctant to express his real purpose directly by implicating an unspoken meaning. It appears useful to explain the role of conversational implicatures and the background assumptions that come into play with a practical example from Albee’s play.

At one point, in order to mitigate Agnes’s verbal attack on Claire’s drinking habits Tobias reluctantly admits: ‘She...she can drink...a little’ (*DB* p. 21). This utterance is not inconsistent with the admission that Claire is an alcoholic. In most contexts,<sup>81</sup> however, it will normally be interpreted as excluding that possibility, on the grounds that if Tobias knew that Claire was an alcoholic the first maxim of quantity (‘Make your contribution as informative as is required’) would have obliged him to be informative enough to say so. It is quite open to the speaker to opt out of the CP, for the purpose of wilfully deceiving the hearer or to apply a maxim of the PP (tact) in order to minimise dispraise of a third party (Claire).

One can deceive or misinform, but the point about the CP is that if speakers misinformed indiscriminately, we should no longer be able to communicate. In

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> This study follows Leech’s definition: ‘Context has been understood in various ways, for example to include “relevant” aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance. I shall consider context to be any background knowledge assumed to be shared by *speaker* and *hearer* and which contributes to *hearer*’s interpretation of what *speaker* means by a given utterance’. (See G. Leech, p. 13).

establishing that the CP is normally followed in communication one is not taking a moral stance but it cannot be denied that principles bring communicative values such as truthfulness into the study of communication. On the other hand, Leech states that so long as the values we consider are the ones we suppose on empirical grounds to be operative in society, he sees no reason to exclude them from his study.

### **4.1.3 Higher-order Principles**

Leech has added other concepts that have a place alongside the CP for the study of interpersonal rhetorics which also will be of use to this study. These Principles which Leech names higher-order principles are however ‘parasitic on the other two’<sup>82</sup> in the following sense: the CP and the PP can be defined by direct reference to their role in producing interpersonal communication, but the higher-order principles can only be explained in terms of other principles as the following expositions will show.

#### **4.1.3.1 The Irony Principle**

Irony is an expression of uncooperative behaviour that flouts the CP, in particular the maxim of quality in order to uphold the PP. Leech sums up the irony principle as follows:

If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn’t overtly conflict with the PP, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> G. Leech, p. 142.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

This type of irony typically takes the form of being too obviously polite for the occasion. It is the result of the speaker blatantly breaking a maxim of the CP in order to uphold the PP. An example of this form of irony is found in the interaction between two characters in Walser's play *Der Abstecher*. At one point FRIEDA announces to HUBERT that she is married and now wants to express her contempt for what she sees as Hubert's arrogance and a far too high an opinion of himself:

HUBERT [...] Vielleicht ist dein Mann wirklich deiner  
würdig. Das ist ja denkbar.  
FRIEDA Der einzige würdige wärest natürlich du gewesen.<sup>84</sup>

Here, by disregarding the quality principle (do not say what you believe to be false) Frieda appears to uphold the PP in order to imply the contrary of what she really means.

According to Leech, the implicature derived from the irony principle works roughly as follows: what the speaker says is polite to the hearer but is clearly not true. What the speaker really means is impolite to the hearer and true. In being polite one is often faced with a clash between the CP and the PP so that one has to choose how far to 'trade off' one against the other; but when a speaker is ironic the PP is exploited in order to uphold at a remote level the CP. A person who is being ironic appears to be deceiving or misleading the hearer, but in fact is indulging in an 'honest' form of apparent deception, at the expense of politeness. However, as will be explained below some forms of irony differ from Leech's concept in that they do not always involve an impolite or 'hostile' dimension.

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<sup>84</sup> M. Walser, 'Der Abstecher', in *Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 17.

Leech also points out how imperatives such as ‘Don’t mind me’ addressed to a person who has just, say, rudely, barged into a speaker, are indirect violations of the maxim of quality and are therefore ironies. We are ironic at someone’s expense, scoring off others by politeness that is obviously insincere, as a substitute for impoliteness. Irony varies in force from the comic to the more offensive irony of sarcastic commands such as the above. But, although it appears to be dysfunctional, in providing a method of being offensive to others the Irony Principles may well have a positive function in permitting aggression to manifest itself in a less dangerous verbal form than by direct criticism, insults, threats etc. It combines the art of attack with an apparent innocence which is a form of self-defense. Because irony pays lip service to the PP, it is less easy to break the PP in one’s response to it. Hence the IP keeps aggression away from the brink of conflict.

Given the significance of the concept of irony for the analysis of literature and for the plays examined in this research project it appears useful to give a brief outline of Sperber and Wilson’s approach which provides an alternative pragmatic view of irony.<sup>85</sup> While, on one hand, Sperber and Wilson clearly recognise the value of the pragmatic theory inspired by Grice’s work, they understand, on the other, Grice’s definition of irony – on which Leech’s concept is based<sup>86</sup> – as greatly simplified. According to Sperber and Wilson ‘irony’ conveys not only propositions which can be accounted for in terms of meaning and implicature but

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<sup>85</sup> D. Sperber and D. Wilson, ‘Irony and the-Use-Mention Distinction’, in P. Cole, ed., *Radical Pragmatics* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), pp. 295–318.

<sup>86</sup> Grice (1975) treats irony as an implicature strategy, rather than as a principle in its own right. Leech does not see a necessary conflict between this and his own treatment of irony as a second-order principle. According to Leech, ‘Such a principle may, in fact, be regarded as a highly institutionalized strategy whereby speakers square their language behaviour with more basic principles such as the CP and the PP. (See G. Leech, p. 102, footnote 2.) Leech treats irony and banter depending on the context as ‘higher- or second-order principles’.

also vaguer suggestions of images and attitudes which occasionally, but not always, indicate the opposite of what is meant. Obviously the speaker transmits something other than what is said but what he communicates is, according to Sperber and Wilson, not the utterance itself but an attitude to the content of the utterance. This distinction is closely related to the distinction drawn in philosophy between the *Use* and *Mention* of an expression. *Use* of an expression involves reference to what the utterance refers to while *Mention* involves reference to the expression itself. To illustrate this point it is useful to draw on one of the numerous examples given by Sperber and Wilson: if, on the occasion of two people being caught in heavy rain one person remarks 'It seems to be raining', this does not express the opposite of what the speaker thinks, it just expresses less than the speaker thinks. Although this utterance might have been informative as the first few drops of rain were falling, in the middle of a downpour it could never be seriously made, except by someone with incredibly slow reactions. The speaker is not trying to pretend that he is such a person nor is he parodying anyone in particular. What he is trying to do is bring to mind this exaggerated slowness of reaction which would itself be worth remarking on in the circumstances. For an utterance to have this effect, it must be obvious that the speaker is drawing attention to the content of the utterance, while at the same time dissociating himself from it. What he communicates is not the utterance itself but an attitude to the contents of the utterance.

Sperber and Wilson claim that most cases of irony involve generally implicit mentions of propositions which are interpreted as echoing a remark or opinion that the speaker wants to characterize as inappropriate or irrelevant. These are semantically distinguishable from cases where the same proposition is used in



order to make an assertion, ask a question and so on. Sperber and Wilson affirm that this account makes it possible to give a more detailed description of a much wider range of examples of irony than the traditional view can handle. Such an approach will also be seen to be useful for the analysis of the numerous situations in the plays where irony plays a significant part.

#### 4.1.3.2 Banter

The Banter Principle is of minor importance compared with the other rhetorical principles that have been examined, yet it is manifested in a great deal of casual linguistic conversation and it also implies solidarity. The Banter Principle might be expressed as follows: ‘In order to show solidarity with the hearer, say something which is (a) obviously untrue, and (b) obviously impolite to the hearer.’<sup>87</sup> Like irony, banter must be clearly recognisable as unserious. In *A Delicate Balance*, the main character Tobias’s utterance directed at Claire, ‘You are a great, damn fool’,<sup>88</sup> seems impolite but in reality expresses concern and empathy towards the hearer.

Since ‘over-politeness’ can have the effect of establishing superiority or ironic distance, ‘under-politeness’ can have the opposite effect of establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity. A low value on the scale of authority and a lack of social distance correlates with a low position on the scale of politeness. The more intimate the relationship the less important it is to be polite. Lack of politeness in itself can become a sign of intimacy and the ability to be impolite to someone in jest helps to establish and maintain a familiar relationship. In Walser’s

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>88</sup> *DB*, p. 19.

play, *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, Helmut and Klaus, who had been fellow students, now married and with their respective spouses, meet by chance in a holiday resort.

Klaus is eager to rekindle his relationship with a reluctant Helmut. He resorts to shared experiences which he expresses in a jocular tone, as in the following example: ‘Er hieß bei uns nur der Leuze-Nietzsche. Und zwar *Zarathustra* auf französisch! Jawohl, Hel. So ein Snob war er. Ist er wahrscheinlich immer noch’.<sup>89</sup> Involving Hel, his attractive wife underlines his attempts to win Helmut over.

According to Leech the implicature derived from the banter principle is the opposite of that derived from the irony principle, since what the speaker says is impolite to the hearer and is clearly untrue whereas what he really means is polite to the hearer and true.<sup>90</sup>

The *Higher-order Principles*, in that they rely upon the implicature of other Principles, involve greater indirectness in the working out of the force of the utterance, and are therefore less powerful in their effect for those included in the conversation.

#### 4.1.3.3 The Hinting Strategy

The hinting strategy consists in uttering an illocution whose goal is interpreted as a subsidiary goal for the performance of another illocution. It implies a second unspoken illocution since it has an ulterior purpose to which the question (or hint) is only an initial step. The maxim of manner (be perspicuous) and the maxim of relation (be relevant) favour the most direct communication of

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<sup>89</sup> M. Walser, *Ein fliehendes Pferd* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 27. Henceforth abbreviated to *FP* and referred to parenthetically in the text with the page number.

<sup>90</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 144.

one's illocutionary goal whereas the hinting strategy forces the addressee to seek indirect interpretation.

An example from Walser's play *Ein fliehendes Pferd* illustrates this strategy. Hel and Sabine are on the stage, with the table laid with food and wine. They are waiting for the male protagonists who are out sailing in spite of the bad weather conditions. While Sabine's attitude shows concern, Hel appears relaxed and anxious to start eating and particularly drinking without waiting for the possible arrival of the two men. As the following interaction will show she is reluctant to express her wishes directly and prefers to use the hinting strategy:

'Ich hab' sogar Hunger. Meinst du, der Wein würde mir auch so schmecken? Sabine schenkt ihr ein. SABINE Bitte. Bedien dich. Hel tut es, Trinkt vorsichtig, ißt.' (FP pp. 54-55).

Hel's question is a means to another purpose. The ulterior illocutionary goal is recognized by the fact that Sabine responds cooperatively with the aim of helping Hel to fulfil her goal. Sabine answers the question but also takes it for granted – 'Bitte bedien dich' – that Hel wants some wine.

#### **4.1.4 The Obliquity and Uninformativeness of Negation**

Negative sentences are pragmatically less favoured than positive ones since they are less informative. When negative sentences are used it will be for a special purpose. They take longer to process than positive ones. Therefore, by choosing a negative sentence instead of a positive one, the speaker makes the utterance more oblique and obscure than need be. The negative sentence strikes the hearer as being 'marked' and as requiring special interpretation and is often a denial of what someone else has asserted. The following example from *A Delicate Balance*

indicates how the choice of a negative utterance can be more enigmatic than a more direct answer would be. It is obvious from the development of the play that Claire is what would generally be described as an alcoholic, a point of view that Agnes strongly advocates. The fact that both Claire – ‘But I’m not an alcoholic, baby!’ – and Tobias, albeit less convincingly – ‘She isn’t an alcoholic...’ – (DB p. 21) contradict Agnes shows that Claire’s addiction in their view requires further interpretation. The obvious reason for violating the maxim of manner (be perspicuous) by using the negative sentence is to deny its positive counterpart.

The negative is often preferred to the syntactically positive equivalent as a form of understatement: When Helmut in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* is ridiculed because he calls Hel by her formal name ‘Helene’ instead of ‘Hel’, he apologizes, albeit reluctantly – ‘Entschuldigung. Ich bin, glaub ich, nicht modern, Hel’ – (FP p. 22). Negation here is a form of mitigating device which may be politeness or simply euphemistic reticence in the expression of opinion and attitude, as in the case of Helmut who seems anxious to avoid any kind of intimacy with Klaus and Hel. Such cases however, do not detract from the general point about negation being *pragmatically* interpreted as denial.

#### **4.1.5 Pragmatic Paradoxes of Politeness**

The determination of two interactants to be as polite as each other leads to an infinite regress in the ‘logic’ of conversational behaviour. We may observe in the pragmatic paradoxes of politeness a comedy of inaction. It is as if two people are eternally prevented from passing through a doorway because each is too polite to go before the other. The paradoxes of politeness function as an antidote to a more dangerous kind of paradox. This more dangerous paradox is a violation of the

logic of goal-oriented action; that is, a state in which two individuals have incompatible goals. It is epitomised in a situation, the opposite of the one described above, in which each of the two persons wanting to go through a doorway attempt to go before the other, with the result that they collide. Such paradoxes clearly lead to direct conflict, and are socially (and physically) perilous. The tact maxim in its most absolute form prevents such incompatibilities. Minimise the cost to hearer carries the implication: ‘do not express the wish – or do – what hearer does not want’.

A practical example from *A Delicate Balance* shows how Agnes’s and Tobias’s determination to hold on to a pattern of polite conversation will eventually collapse when they have to face what they consider an unacceptable request. Agnes and Tobias gather from Edna’s and Harry’s unexpected appearance that theirs is not a normal visit. By imposing a polite and ineffectual pattern of interaction, they are doing their best to avoid having to confront the real reason for their visit:

AGNES Edna? Harry? What a surprise! Tobias, it’s Harry and Edna. Come in. Why don’t you take off your...  
(HARRY and EDNA enter. *They seem somewhat ill at ease, strained for such close friends.*) (DB p. 27)

The visitors are trying to follow the line of interaction in the same manner:

HARRY (*Rubbing his hands; attempt being bluff.*)  
Well, now! (DB p. 27)

The development of the play shows that it is not feasible to continue avoiding the real reason for Harry’s and Edna’s appearance with the situation finally becoming unsustainable when Harry and Edna openly declare their intention to stay with them – ‘HARRY [...] There was no one else we could go to.’ (DB p. 32)

– a request which Agnes and Tobias find unacceptable as Tobias's final emotional outbreak that culminates in his final admission, 'I DON'T WANT YOU HERE' (*DB* p. 88), indicates.

#### **4.1.6 Tact and Condensation**

Indirect utterances do not always imply optionality. If a speaker asks a hearer 'Would you like to do this for me?' on the face of it he is being polite in offering the hearer a choice. But in fact sentences like these often trade on the authoritative status of the speaker. His/her position is such that the hearer cannot but acknowledge his/her authority and feels obliged to accept the 'offer'. If she/he recognises that speaker's tact is insincere, the latter will merely make an impression of condensation. In these cases, as in cases of irony, being too polite can mean impoliteness.

#### **4.1.7 Metalinguistic Aspects of Politeness**

Politeness is manifested not only in the content of conversation, but also in the way conversation is managed and structured by its participants. Conversational behaviour such as speaking at the wrong time (interrupting) or being silent at the wrong time has impolite implications. Consequently, one finds it necessary to seek permission or to apologise for speaking: 'May I ask you if ...' or 'I must warn you that...'. Such utterances are 'metalinguistic' in that, through indirect speech, they refer to illocutions of a current conversation. By employing a hinting strategy the speaker wants to obtain the conversational cooperation of the hearer. Part of the reason for using such metalinguistic strategies is that speech acts like other kinds of action involve some cost or benefit to the speaker and

hearer. Answering a question involves some cooperative effort on the part of the person addressed and in addition, some questions may be felt to be a serious imposition in that they threaten the privacy of the hearer.

To engage a person in a conversation, particularly if that person is a stranger or a superior – e.g., an addressee who is ‘distant’ in terms of the horizontal and vertical scales<sup>91</sup> – may be regarded an act of presumption. Indirect askings, also known as ‘hedged performatives’ (‘I wonder if you could...’) are polite mitigations of utterances. One cannot automatically assume the right to engage someone in a conversation, let alone to use the conversation as a means to one’s own ends.

The opening scene of *The Zoo Story*,<sup>92</sup> Albee’s first play to achieve recognition, shows how by switching from direct confrontation to a metalinguistic strategy the speaker can coax the hearer into assisting him, albeit involuntarily, to achieve his illocutionary goal. As the curtain rises, Peter, ‘*is seated on a bench [...] reading a book*’ (ZSt p. 12), unwilling to react to the character Jerry’s verbal attacks: ‘I’ve been to the zoo. (PETER *doesn’t notice*) I said, I’ve been to the zoo MISTER, I’VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!’ (ZSt p. 12). Jerry continues to fire direct questions at PETER who reacts ‘*puzzled*’ (ZSt p. 12) ‘*[...] anxious to dismiss him*’ (ZSt p. 13), ‘*[...] a little annoyed*’ (ZSt p. 13), making several attempts ‘*[...] to get back to his reading*’ (ZSt p. 12). Only when Jerry realises that he cannot reach Peter through this direct approach, does he resort to a metalinguistic strategy: ‘Do you mind if we talk?’ (ZSt p. 14). He has now manoeuvred Peter into a position where he has

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<sup>91</sup> See section 3.1.11 on Pragmatic Scales.

<sup>92</sup> E. Albee, ‘The Zoo Story’, in *The American Dream and The Zoo Story* (New York: Signet Book, Penguin Books, 1959) Henceforth abbreviated to ZSt (in order to avoid confusion with *Die Zimmerschlacht* hereunder abbreviated ZS) and referred to parenthetically in the text with the page number.

no alternative but to put ‘*his book down, his pipe out and away, smiling*’ (Zst p. 14). For the rest of the scene Jerry will alternate between threatening Peter’s privacy by firing direct questions at him or using a metalinguistic strategy when the channel of communication threatens to break down. His deliberate violation of the maxims of the PP is part of an overall strategy directed towards attaining open confrontation with his opponent.

#### 4.1.8 The Phatic Maxim

The problem of how to end a conversation politely shows that there is a close connection between politeness and the activity of talking merely to preserve sociability. The phatic maxim may be formulated either in its negative form ‘avoid silence’ or in its positive form ‘keep talking’. The need to avoid silence with its implication of opting out of a conversation accounts for the discussion of rather trivial subjects and for the occurrence of rather uninformative statements (‘You have a new outfit’).<sup>93</sup> Such remarks violate the maxim of quantity, yet here is another example where an apparent breach of the CP can be explained in terms of another maxim e.g., the *Phatic Maxim*. Such a conversation could also serve to extend the common ground of agreement and experience shared by the participants. Hence the choice of subject matter tends to concentrate on the attitude of the speaker rather than on matters of fact.

In Walser’s play *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, Klaus is determined to renew his relationship with Helmut, by recalling shared experiences. When at Klaus’s

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<sup>93</sup> Here the polite and impolite implications of silence must also be considered. What on the surface appears to be a breach of the CP may at times be the only form of polite behaviour not available in a conversation, yet silence is often a sign of opting out of a conversation and is hence in many circumstances a form of impoliteness. On the communicative value of silence, see Adam Jaworski, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (London: Sage, 1992).



insistence Helmut finally acknowledges the existence of a mutual female acquaintance, ‘Sie war aus Worms’, Klaus invites him to elaborate on the experience by repeatedly referring to Helmut’s utterance, ‘Helmut genau die war aus Worms’, ‘Mein Gott, war die aus Worms, Helmut, was?!’ and ‘Die war aus Worms, was Helmut?’ (*FP* p. 29). By suggesting to the hearer that the speaker has noticed something of which the hearer is already aware, he gives the hearer an opportunity to elaborate on personal experience in a new direction.

#### **4.1.9 Hyperbole and Litotes**

To understand these pragmatic strategies we have to appreciate that truthfulness is not always a matter of making a straightforward choice between truth and falsehood, since truth is often represented in terms of values. Hyperbole (overstatement) refers to a case where the speaker’s description is stronger than is warranted by the state of affairs described and litotes (understatement) refers to the converse of this.

Hyperbole is a violation of the maxim of quality and litotes is a violation of the maxim of quantity. But as with irony, the violation of the maxims of the CP is only a superficial matter. These rhetorical terms would not be applied to utterances in which over- or understatement was actually used to deceive the addressee. One common way in which hyperbole manifests itself is the temptation to exaggerate when retelling a personal anecdote or to make speech more interesting in the sense of having unpredictability or news value. But if overstatements are used frequently, the addressee inevitably adjusts his interpretation so that they lose interest and become predictable.

The status of statements as hyperbole or litotes can only be confirmed when they occur in context. Walser resorts to hyperbole to express certain attitudes of the characters in his plays. In *Die Zimmerschlacht* Felix's utterances such as 'das enorme Weibsbild' or 'er zeigt der enormen Neuen, daß er über uns steht',<sup>94</sup> (ZS p.122) are meant to convey contempt for the young woman his friend Benno had recently married while in reality and as Felix later admits, he is trying to cover feelings of lust and envy.<sup>95</sup>

The relationship between hyperbole and litotes is largely parallel to that of politeness and irony. Just as the irony principle sacrifices politeness for the sake of the CP, so litotes sacrifices the interestingness of overstatement for the sake of apparent honesty of understatement. In *Ein fliehendes Pferd* Walser endows the character Klaus with a constant flow of hyperbolic utterances. Klaus refers to Helmut as '[das] Sternbild meiner Jugendtage' or the 'Tag und Nacht feuerspeiende[r] HH' (FP p. 24). Words like<sup>96</sup> 'der helle Wahnsinn' (FP p. 26), 'unheimlich gut' (FP p. 28), 'brilliant', 'glänzend', 'großartig' (FP p. 45) are used indiscriminately, to which Helmut reacts with laconic and understated utterances. The difference between Klaus's and Helmut's speech – hyperboli on the one side, understatement on the other – is indicated through the stage instructions: '*Im Gegensatz zu Klaus dramatisiert Helmut nicht, sondern spricht flach, schnell, leicht.*' (FP p. 29). The author emphasises this distinction between the two characters and urges the audience to foresee the conflict that will arise from these conflicting attitudes.

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<sup>94</sup> M. Walser, 'Die Zimmerschlacht', in *Martin Walser. Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 122. Henceforth abbreviated to ZS and referred to parenthetically in the text with the page number.

<sup>95</sup> Compare Felix's long speech in *Die Zimmerschlacht*, pp. 142-143.

Leech refers to another concept in which he sees a similarity to the above-mentioned principles: The pollyana hypothesis, named after Eleanor H. Porter's optimistic heroine in the novel *Pollyana*. In a communicative framework, it means that participants in a conversation will prefer pleasant topics to unpleasant ones. The negative aspect of this principle is euphemism. One can disguise unpleasant objects by referring to them by means of apparently inoffensive expressions. Another aspect is to understate the degree to which things are bad by using minimising adverbs. The influence of the pollyana principle causes both optimistic overstatement and euphemistic understatement.

#### 4.1.10 Pragmatic Scales<sup>97</sup>

Finally, it is useful for the analysis of interaction in the plays to give a short description of the five different *Pragmatic Scales* Leech has identified which have a bearing on the use of the conversational principles and which are linked to each other. Before giving an account of Leech's explanations of pragmatic scales it is worth referring to Brown and Levinson's elaborations which will be explored further in section 4.2.2 of this study on sociological variables that go into assessing a Face Threatening Act (FTA) and the exploitation of such strategies. R. Brown and A. Gilman's work, *Pronouns of Power and Solidarity*, on which the present section is based, has, according to Leech, also provided the framework for Brown and Levinson's study on a similar subject.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Compare G. Leech, pp. 123-127.

<sup>98</sup> See R. Brown and A. Gilman 'Pronouns of Power and Solidarity' in T. A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 253-76, as quoted by G. Leech, p. 235. For a detailed explanation of Brown and Levinson's view on sociological variables see also P. Brown and S.C. Levinson, pp. 74-84.

Leech offers a useful overview of how interactants choose to proceed to achieve their goal. Brown and Levinson give a detailed description of the particular effect of what they see as ‘sociological variables’ and the effects their exploitation have on interaction. In order to avoid repetition I will therefore illustrate Brown and Levinson’s elaborations with examples from the plays that are equally applicable to Leech’s theory that I will also be referring to in the following.

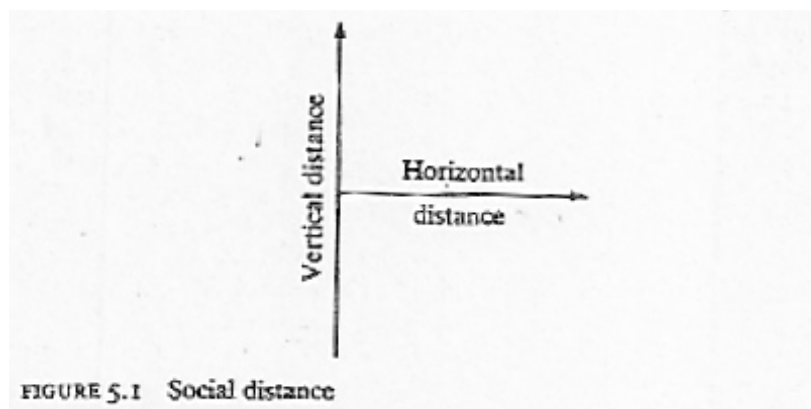
1) The *Cost-Benefit Scale* is evaluated in terms of what the speaker assumes will be the cost or benefit of a speech act to the speaker or to the hearer. It brings with it an implicit balance-sheet of the speaker’s and the hearer’s relative standing and there also seems to be a tacit assumption that maintenance of equilibrium in terms of cost and benefit to both parties is desirable. The goal of some speech acts, such as thanks and apologies, can often be seen as the restoration or at least the reduction of an imbalance in the equilibrium between speaker’s and hearer’s cost and benefit.

2) The *Indirectness Scale* is one on which illocutions are ordered from the speaker’s point of view with respect to the length of the path (in terms of means-end analysis) connecting the illocutionary act to its illocutionary goal. A pragmatic scale is obtained by keeping the same propositional content and increasing the scale of politeness by using a more indirect kind of illocution. Indirect illocutions tend to be more polite (a) because they increase the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be.

3) The *Optionality Scale* on which illocutions are ordered according to the amount of choice which the speaker allows to the hearer. The degree of

indirectness does not always correlate to the degree to which the hearer is allowed the choice of not performing the intended action. There are situations, as mentioned under point 4.1.7 *Tact and Condensation*, where the hearer only appears to be given a choice, when in reality the speaker's authoritative status obliges the hearer to accept what appears to be an offer, leaving the speaker free to enjoy the pleasure of condensation.

In addition Leech draws on two further scales that greatly influence communicational strategies which he visualises in the following two-dimensional graph:



The vertical axis measures the degree of distance in terms of 'power' or authority of one participant over another. This is an asymmetric measure, so that someone in authority may use a familiar form of address to someone who, in return uses a respectful form. The horizontal axis, on the other hand, measures the social distance. The overall degree of respectfulness for a given speech situation, depends largely on factors of status, age, degree of intimacy, etc. but also to some extent on the temporary role of one person relative to another.

#### 4.1.11 Conclusion

Leech's work deals in great part with the detailed description of pragmatic principles. The aim is to extend Grice's CP by developing and illustrating a model of interpersonal rhetoric where the PP, plus a number of other principles and maxims, play a significant part in the description of pragmatic force. The function of the CP is to ensure that one participant cooperates with the other, while the function of the PP is to ensure that this cooperation persists even where the personal goals of speaker and hearer are in conflict. Leech proposes a number of additional principles that together with the CP and the PP provide a suitable yardstick for conversational behaviour. In the dynamics of discourse the goals of the participants will be 'negotiated', such that at least the following outcomes will be possible: 1) One of the interactants adopts the other participant's goal, 2) they agree on a common goal intermediate between their original goal, 3) they fail to agree on any goal.

Leech's extensive model of interpersonal rhetoric constitutes a suitable framework for the analysis of interactional dynamics in modern drama where 'action' in the traditional sense is substituted by talk.<sup>99</sup> The strategies as described above will help to clarify the different forms of communicative behaviour that characterise the plays to be analysed and allow insight into the nature of the goals the characters set themselves and the strategies they use to achieve them.

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<sup>99</sup> See also the introduction of this thesis.

## 4.2 Brown and Levinson's Theory: Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use<sup>100</sup>

Si la politesse est une valeur, ce qu'on ne peut nier, c'est une valeur ambiguë, en elle-même insuffisante – elle peut recouvrir le meilleur comme le pire – et à ce titre presque suspecte. Ce travail sur la forme doit cacher quelque chose, mais quoi? (*André Comte-Sponville: Petit traité des grandes vertus*)<sup>101</sup>

As explained in section 2.1 of this study, there have been several approaches to the relatively new linguistic-pragmatic discipline. These approaches differ on some points and on others converge and complement one another. By applying concepts from the different works concurrently and setting them against each other, a comprehensive and more insightful analysis of interaction in the plays should result than the application of one approach alone could provide.

While Leech's conversational model is based on the interplay of Grice's CP with his own PP as well as other additional concepts arising from the interplay of the CP and the PP, Brown and Levinson maintain that their own more economical apparatus, based solely on the interplay of politeness and Grice's CP, covers the whole pattern of language use.<sup>102</sup> The approach provides an additional tool which is especially useful to explain the communication strategies in Albee's play *A Delicate Balance* where politeness, as well as the ambiguity the concept implies, are a central theme.

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<sup>100</sup> P. Brown, S.C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Use*. Since the theoretical premises in this chapter are based on this work, I will for reasons of better legibility refer to it for exact quotations only and for additional points of reference.

<sup>101</sup> André Comte-Sponville, *Petit traité des grandes vertus* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>102</sup> The function of Grice's Cooperative Principle has been briefly outlined in section 4.1.1.

In Brown and Levinson's view, the Gricean CP and its maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner constitute a presumptive framework for communication that underlies every talk exchange. Apparent uncooperative behaviour would then be interpreted as in fact cooperative at a deeper level. Thus a partial answer to a question would not undermine the presumption of cooperation, but would more likely be interpreted as, say, the inability to meet the requisite demands for factual information. Brown and Levinson are not prepared to accord maxim-like status to Leech's introduction of a PP and its numerous maxims since they would then have the same robustness as Grice's CP making it hard to be impolite.<sup>103</sup> The invention of a maxim for every regularity in language use would in their view make it difficult to permit the recognition of any counter examples. The Gricean CP and its maxims would define the basic set of assumptions underlying every talk exchange but this would not imply that utterances must in general or even reasonably frequently meet these conditions since the majority of natural conversations do not proceed in such a direct or even brusque fashion at all. The whole thrust of Brown and Levinson's as well as Leech's argument is that politeness is a necessary source of departure from Grice's CP that makes for successful interaction. However, while Leech maintains that without the interplay of Grice's CP and his own PP conversations would break down, Brown and Levinson explain that one powerful motive for not meeting the maxims of the CP is the desire to give some attention to face.

The mutual awareness of face sensitivity and the application of face preserving strategies are central to Brown/Levinson's model. The concept of face is derived from Goffman who associates *face* with notions of being embarrassed

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<sup>103</sup> Compare the elaborations on Leech's PP in section 4.1 of this research project.



or humiliated or losing face.<sup>104</sup> Thus face is seen as something in which the speaker invests emotionally and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction. It is normally of mutual interest to the interactants to maintain each other's face, that is, to act in ways that assure the other participants that the agent is heedful of the assumptions concerning face. Just what this heedfulness consists of is the essence of Brown and Levinson's work.

To Brown and Levinson, respect for face is a basic value which every member in a communication knows every other member desires and which, in general, it is in the interest of every member to partially satisfy. It is not in general required that an actor fully satisfy another's face wants. They can be and often are ignored, not just in cases of social breakdown (effrontery) but also in cases of urgent cooperation. Certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those that by their nature run contrary to the wants of the addressee and/or the speaker. These face-threatening acts are referred to by Brown and Levinson as FTAs and will henceforth be referred to in this study in the same manner.

Unless the speaker's desire to do an FTA with maximum efficiency, something which Brown and Levinson define as a bald on record strategy,<sup>105</sup> is greater than the speaker's desire to preserve the hearer's face to any degree, the speaker will try to minimise the face threat of the FTA through redressive strategies. Redressive strategies are seen as actions that *give face* to the addressee, that is they attempt to counteract the potential damage of the FTA by doing it with

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<sup>104</sup> Compare P.B. Brown and S.C. Levinson, p. 61. See also E. Goffman *Interactional Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behaviour*.

<sup>105</sup> This concept is treated extensively in section 4.2.1.

such modifications or additions which indicate clearly that no such threat is intended.

The following extract from *Ein fliehendes Pferd* shows how Klaus tries to mitigate offensive verbal attacks on Helmut through redressive strategies. He warns Helmut, in whom he detects signs of emotional and sexual impoverishment, by opposing his own attitude to life. To counteract the potential face threat such an utterance represents he inserts redressive action. Redressive action attempts to counteract the potential face threat of an FTA by doing it with such modifications or additions that indicate that no such face threat is intended. With the following utterance Klaus offers partial compensation for the face threat by redressing some particular other wants of hearer:

Na ja. Du warst eben immer Spitze. Klar. Trotzdem wage ich es, weitgehende Vorschläge zu machen. Ich behaupte, es sei nötig. Du mußt gerettet werden. Du brauchst mich, Helmut, das spür ich. Deshalb vorher meine Frage, wie oft bumst du Sabine. Ich will dich doch nicht beschämen, Mensch. Mensch, Helmut. Mit mir kannst du reden. (*FP* p. 46).

This strategy is used repeatedly by Klaus throughout the first chapter: the attempt to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it with modifications or additions, indicates that no real threat is intended, that Klaus treats Helmut as a friend, as a person whose desires are known and accepted and makes clear that his FTA is not a negative evaluation of Helmut's face. On the other hand, regardless of his affirmations that no threat is intended, Helmut's uneasy reaction – 'Ich weiß nicht ob du das richtig siehst, Sabine und ich sind, so wie wir sind, durchaus wie soll ich sagen...' (*FP* p. 46) – indicates that Klaus's blunt approach has had the desired effect of disturbing Helmut.

Central to Brown and Levinson's research is the assumption that all individuals have positive and negative face. Their model for linguistic realisations of politeness is based on the concept of positive and negative face and its derivatives of positive and negative politeness. Negative politeness strategies are essentially avoidance-based and consist of assurances that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee's negative face-wants and will not interfere with the addressee's freedom from imposition. An example from *A Delicate Balance* shows how Agnes tries to avert the imposition of the visiting friends who plan to stay at her home indefinitely, by insisting on what Brown and Levinson see as strategies of negative politeness. It is clear from the very beginning of the friends' appearance that theirs is not a casual visit:

(HARRY and EDNA *enter. They seem somewhat ill at ease, strained for such close friends.*) (DB p. 27)

During the development of the interaction Agnes makes repeated use of negative politeness strategies to express her unwillingness to acknowledge concern for Edna's and Harry's real wants, thus giving the visitors an opportunity to renounce their real claim. Agnes pretends to ignore their repeated appeal for sympathy by attempting to keep the conversation on a superficial, albeit polite level:

AGNES (*Jumping in, just as a tiny silence commences. [...] Sit down. We were just having a cordial . . .*  
(*Curiously loud.*) Have you been . . . out? Uh, to the club? (DB pp. 27)

.....  
AGNES (*Nervous, apologetic, covering.*) I wondered, for I thought perhaps you'd dropped by here on your way from there.

HARRY . . . No, no. . .

AGNES . . . Or perhaps that we were having a party, and I'd lost a day. . .  
(DB p. 28)

Ignoring her sister Claire's persistent attempts to enquire after the real reason for the unexpected appearance of the friends – 'Why did you come?' and 'What happened Harry?' (DB p. 29) – Agnes makes renewed efforts to keep the conversation on an impersonal basis: 'I don't think why people have to be questioned when they've come for a friendly . . . ' (DB p. 29).

Whereas negative politeness encourages mainly freedom from imposition, the most salient aspect of positive face and its derivative of positive politeness, is the wish to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired. In opposition to Agnes, Claire deploys a strategy of positive politeness by being sympathetic to the unexpected visitors' request: '(Exaggerated but not unkind) How's the old Harry? HARRY. (*Self-pity*. [...]) Pretty well Claire, not as good as I'd like, but . . . ' (DB p. 28). Positive politeness redress is directed at the addressee's positive face, his desire that his wants should be thought of as desirable and not just by anyone but by some particular others especially relevant to the particular goal.

With negative politeness, redressing is restricted to the imposition itself, that is to the particular want infringed by the FTA, with positive politeness the sphere of redress is widened to the appreciation of the hearer's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between the speaker's and the hearer's wants. Positive face redress indicates that even if the speaker cannot with total sincerity say *I want your wants*, he/she can at least sincerely indicate to the hearer that he/she wants his/her positive face to be satisfied. Thus, the insincerity is compensated for by the implication that the speaker really sincerely wants the hearer's positive face to be enhanced.

The following example shows how Agnes, although she disapproves of Tobias's drinking in the early hours of the morning shows understanding and sympathy: after, to the family's relief, the visitors are 'safely gone'. AGNES (*moves to TOBIAS, puts her arms around him.*):

AGNES (*Sigh.*) Well. Here we all are. You all right, my darling?  
 TOBIAS (*Clears his throat.*) Sure.  
 AGNES (*Still with her arms around him.*) Your daughter has taken to drinking in the morning, I hope you'll notice.  
 TOBIAS (*Unconcerned*) Oh? (*Moves away from her*) I had one here . . . somewhere, one with Harry. Oh, there it is.  
 AGNES (*Crosses to R. table.*) Well, I would seem to have three early-morning drinkers now. [...]  
 TOBIAS Just think of it as very late at night.  
 AGNES All right, I will. (*Silence.*) (DB p. 92)

The example shows that although Agnes does not approve of Tobias's drinking in the early hours of the morning, she still wants to enhance his positive face. The use of familiar or intimate language – she appears to be amused if not in agreement – and gestures (*her arms around him*) give the linguistic realisation of positive politeness a redressive force.

Negative politeness on the other hand is characterised by conventional indirectness, hedges<sup>106</sup> on illocutionary force, polite pessimism about the success of a request, etc. While positive politeness linguistic realisations are forms of minimising social distance, negative politeness is in general a form of social distancing. Just as one or more speech acts can be assigned to an utterance, there

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<sup>106</sup> For the purpose of this analysis I have adopted a brief definition of Brown and Levinson's of 'hedge' as being a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicator noun phrase by saying that it is partially true or true in certain respects ('I am *pretty* sure I have seen this film'). Certain usages are conveyed by hedged performatives, that is, they alter the force of a speech act (suppose, guess, think). Finally they also diminish potential threats to cooperative interaction. Hedges can also be prosodic and kinesic. For a comprehensive engagement with this concept, see Brown and Levinson, pp. 145-172.

can be a mixture of elements deriving from positive *and* negative politeness strategies in an interaction or even in a given utterance. An example from *A Delicate Balance* illustrates how positive and negative strategies hybridise, often through gestures and voice inflections. When the play finally reaches a point where the friends reveal the real motive of their visit, Agnes and Tobias are forced to show empathy.

HARRY [...] You're our very best friends  
 EDNA (*Crying softly now.*) In the whole world.  
 AGNES (*Comforting, arms around her.*) Now, now Edna.  
 HARRY (*apologizing some.*) We couldn't go anywhere else, so we came here.  
 AGNES (*A deep breath, control.*) Well, we'll . . . you did the right thing . . . of course.  
 TOBIAS Sure.  
 EDNA. Can I go to bed now? Please?  
 AGNES (*Pause; then not quite understanding.*) Bed?  
 HARRY We can't go back there.  
 EDNA Please.  
 AGNES (*Distant.*) Bed? (*DB p. 31*)

The above shows how gestures and voice inflections like '*arms around her*' that express empathy (positive politeness), '*deep breath control*' that emphasises hesitation and '*Distant*' are negative politeness strategies. Conversational principles often have as their source strong background assumptions and, based on their expectations, the friends coerce Agnes and Tobias into giving in to their demand when they are not prepared to do so. But for the sake of keeping the communicational channels open Agnes and Tobias hybridise negative and positive politeness strategies.

#### 4.2.1 Possible Strategies for doing FTAs

It has already been pointed out that given the mutual vulnerability of face, interactants will seek to avoid face threatening acts or will employ certain strategies to minimise the threat or at least take into consideration the relative weightings of (at least) three desires: 1) the desire to communicate the content of the FTA, 2) the desire to be efficient and urgent, and 3) the desire to maintain the hearer's face to some degree. Unless 2) is greater than 3) the speaker will want to minimise the threat of the FTA. Brown and Levinson name a possible set of strategies designed to effect an FTA without the need for redressive action, making a distinction between on record and bald on record strategies. An actor goes on record in doing an act if it is clear to participants that there is only one attributable intention that led him to do the act. In drama on record *statements* are infrequent since language is presented in such a condensed form that every utterance has more than one significative value. The off record strategy on the other hand, is more significant for the development and interpretation of modern drama. On the one hand, it implies more than one interpretation of a speech act so that the actor cannot be held responsible for having committed himself to one particular intention while, on the other, it provides significant clues also for the reader/viewer as to what is implied in the character's utterance. Linguistic realisations of off-record strategies include metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies and all kinds of hints as to what a speaker wants or means to communicate without doing so directly, 'so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable'.<sup>107</sup> The plays in question present ample material for the analysis of off-record strategies as defined here. Examples from *A Delicate*

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<sup>107</sup> Brown, S.C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*, p. 69.

*Balance* show how by being ironic the speaker implies more than one interpretation, as the words actually used appear to mean something different to what is presumably intended in the context.

AGNES You have a problem there with Julia.

TOBIAS (*Crosses to U. C.*) I? I have a problem!

AGNES Yes. (*Gentle irony.*) But at least you have your women with you – crowded – round, firm arm, support. *That* must be a comfort to you. (*DB p. 74*)

It is clear that Agnes's remark is meant ironically since the text shows, and Agnes's derogative remarks have made clear, that the other two, the daughter, Julia, and Agnes's sister, Claire, who are part of the family circle, far from supporting Tobias, are a constant source of problems. An example of rhetorical questions would be Agnes's persuasion tactics to try and manipulate the unexpected visitors, Edna and Harry, into concealing rather than revealing the real motives for their sudden appearance. As has been described, Agnes insists on ignoring the visitor's attempts to talk about their problem by repeatedly suggesting that theirs is only a casual visit.

A bald on record strategy goes a step further than on record strategies, since it involves doing an act without redressive action in the most clear, unambiguous way. An FTA will normally be done in this way only where the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee, where the speaker is vastly superior in power to the hearer and where he/she can enlist others' support to destroy the speaker's face without losing his own. Also where the interactants tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interest of urgency or efficiency or in offers, suggestions and requests that are clearly in the hearer's interest and do not imply loss of face. The following examples will show how



these strategies work in the plays. An excerpt from Walser's *Die Zimmerschlacht* illustrates how a conflict between the characters comes at a point at which both are beyond fearing retribution. During a long emotional speech Felix explains why he is sexually attracted to young women and not to the middle-aged Trude, his wife:

Dein komischer Felix entdeckt plötzlich, rundherum wimmelt es von vierundzwanzigjährigen. Und Felix fühlt sich fast als Mann. Falls überhaupt noch, denkt er, dann mit denen. Hier gilt was bewußtlos macht. Und das bist nicht du. Das sind sie. (ZS p. 144)

After Felix's outburst Trude feels entitled to the same bald on record strategy: 'Ich hätte es nicht gewagt. Du kannst dir denken, daß ich auch etwas zu sagen hätte' (ZS p. 145). Her long speech dwells mainly on her disappointment at Felix's sexual performance which she describes in stark terms as 'so dilettantisch, auf seine so gemeine Weise unvollkommen' (ZS p. 146).

An example from *A Delicate Balance* shows how an FTA can be carried out without redressive action because the speaker feels superior to the hearer and can also enlist another actor's support to destroy the hearer's face. Agnes's marital status entitles her to impose rules of behaviour on Claire, her unmarried sister, who lives with the couple: 'CLAIRE. And who is to say! AGNES. I! CLAIRE. [...] If we are to live here, on Tobias's charity, then we are subject to the will of his wife [...]. AGNES (*Final*) Those are the ground rules (DB p.22).' Agnes also counts on Tobias, who shows his unwillingness to support Claire by remaining silent. CLAIRE. (*A sad smile.*) Tobias? (*Pause.*) Nothing? (...) Are those the ground rules? Nothing? (DB p. 22).

Finally, an example from *Ein fliehendes Pferd* shows that there are occasions where the speaker feels that the bald on record strategy is justified and does not

imply loss of face for the hearer. When the dramatic situation reaches a climax, Klaus leaves the scene without a word to Helmut and Sabine. The latter, who feels the need to bring things out into the open, urges Klaus to stay: ‘Moment, halt, Klaus!’ (*FP* p. 71). Sabine sees this as an urgent request that is in Klaus’s interest. Requests like ‘Come in’ or ‘Do sit down’ are also bald on-record strategies that are in the interest of hearer and do not imply loss of face.

To conclude: the bald on-record strategy can be defined as speaking in conformity with Grice’s maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner. However, as previously stated, the majority of conversations do not meet these conditions with politeness being a major source of deviation.

#### **4.2.2 Sociological Variables that go into Assessing an FTA**

I refer in this connection to section 4.1.10 on Leech’s elaborations on pragmatic scales. As has been mentioned, Leech maintains that both his own description of pragmatic scales as well as Brown and Levinson’s description of social variables are based on Brown and Gilman’s study *Pronouns of Power and Solidarity*.<sup>108</sup> Whereas Leech investigates the bearing pragmatic scales have on the degree of tact appropriate to a speech situation, Brown and Levinson see the different sociological variables as partly determining the degree of politeness of an FTA.

Brown and Levinson clarify that the above criteria are not intended as sociologists’ ratings but as social parameters for the purpose of a communicative act and are based on the assumption that actors are mutually aware of such

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<sup>108</sup> Compare G. Leech, footnote 97 of this study.

ratings, at least within certain limits.<sup>109</sup> The following variables contribute to establishing the level of politeness with which an FTA will be communicated: the social distance (D) between speaker and hearer, the relative 'power' (P) and the absolute ranking (R) of impositions. D is a symmetrical social dimension of similarity/difference between speaker and hearer for the purpose of an act. Social closeness is usually reflected in the reciprocal giving and receiving of positive face and in many cases – but not all – it is based on an assessment of the frequency of interaction. P is seen as an asymmetrical social dimension of relative power that measures the degree to which the hearer can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation at the expense of the speaker's plans and self-evaluation. Brown and Levinson speak of two sources of P: material control over economic distribution and physical force or metaphysical control over the actions of others by virtue of metaphysical forces to which those others subscribe. R is a culturally and situationally defined ranking of impositions by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an actor's desires for self-determination or approval (his negative and positive face wants). The social dimensions of D, P and R can be context and role dependent and the seriousness or weightiness of a particular FTA is made up of both risk to the speaker's and to the hearer's face in a proportion relative to the nature of the FTA. Basically, apologies and confessions are essentially threats to a speaker's face and advice and orders are threats to a hearer's face while requests and offers are likely to threaten the face of both participants. The example below should clarify the strategic use the actors make of the different devices explained above.

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<sup>109</sup> P. Brown and S.C. Levinson, pp. 74-76.

### 4.2.3 Exploitation of Strategies

How the different strategies interact with each other will be explained with reference to *A Delicate Balance*. The speaker and the hearer will have some estimate of the seriousness of the bearing of D, P and R on an FTA but the speaker may choose to rerank the weighting of one of the variables at the expense of the other in order for the speech act to be successful. As has been mentioned before in a different context, Edna and Harry base the request to stay permanently at Agnes's and Tobias's home on the assumption of their mutual friendship: 'HARRY. (*Matter-of-fact, but a hint of daring under it.*) We couldn't stay there, and so we came here. You're our very best friends' (*DB* p. 31). Here, Harry and Edna are trying to rerank R (rating of imposition) by emphasizing the minimal social distance ('very best friends') between them. The speaker takes advantage of mutual knowledge assumptions between speaker and hearer of their respective social distance (D) and tries to act as though R (ranking of imposition) is smaller than he in fact knows (and knows that hearer knows) it really is. Harry – the visitor – hopes that positive-politeness optimism, based on their mutual friendship will convince Tobias and Agnes that theirs is not a very big or unreasonable request. This is risky, as Tobias and Agnes may decide that it is D or P that the addressee is manipulating, rather than R, and take offence. But the fact that there are three possible variables to manipulate, means that the choice of which one is manipulated is off record (the off record strategy implies more than one intention so that the actor cannot be made responsible for having committed himself to one particular intention) and the speaker could argue – if challenged by the hearer – that he did not mean to imply that D or P was small, simply that R was small. On the other hand, if the speaker goes bald on record (doing an act in the most clear,

unambiguous way) implying that he does not fear the hearer's retaliation and his exploitation is successful, it becomes part of the interaction and alters the values of D or P.

Another kind of exploitation of the power connotations contained in a bald-on-record strategy can be seen in offers. A request can syntactically become a command if the speaker pretends that he has the power to force the hearer to act. Equally a speaker may try to redefine something that he really wants (a request) as being something that the hearer would want (an offer). In *Ein fliehendes Pferd* Klaus wants to make attractive to the unwilling Helmut the prospect of going dancing together: 'Heute Abend gehen wir tanzen. Aber ja, Helmut [...] Genau das was du brauchst' (FP p. 25). The fact that the speaker may exploit in this manner the inverse relationship between requests and offers indicates that both parties are aware of negative-face values as offering less of an imposition than requesting. The same rule holds for the redefinition of threats as advice.

An example from Walser's *Die Zimmerschlacht* shows how the speaker may exploit the relationship between on record strategy and intimacy by trying to rerank distance. In intimate relations it is presumed that there is little danger of face threats. This often makes possible bald-on-record insults or jokes. Conventionalised and often ritualised insults are used to stress intimacy. Sometimes the addressee is forced to accept lightly what he considers offensive. Based on previous experience, Felix, Walser's protagonist in *Die Zimmerschlacht*, foresees and describes his friend Benno's behaviour. Benno's apparent assertions of intimacy will, according to Felix, in reality be offensive and make Felix into the laughing stock of the party:

FELIX Und wenn wir hingehen und er stellt mich seiner Dingsda, dieser Neuerwerbung vor, ich höhr ihn schon wie er sagt: darf ich dich bekannt machen das ist unser Felix, Herr Doktor Felix Fürst. Erdkunde und Geschichte, aber Geschichte will er abstoßen, unser Felix [...] ach bitte, Felix, fang erst in einer halben Stunde davon an, meine junge Frau muß sich zuerst an alles gewöhnen. Und wenn er das gesagt hat kassiert er euer Grinsen und du grinst mit, weil du für diesen Kampf zu naiv bist, du spürst nicht die Beleidigung. (ZS p. 121)

Insulting the person in front of an audience presents a further exploitation since the addressee is forced to take lightly insults which the speaker justifies with their mutual knowledge of a close relationship but which are not consistent with the hearer's real feelings.

#### **4.2.4 Conclusion**

Brown and Levinson set out to define the interpretability of politeness phenomena. This interpretability derives from the mutual knowledge assumptions of interacting individuals provided that these humans are rational and have face. On these lines Brown and Levinson construct an overall theory of politeness, integrating notions of polite friendliness (positive politeness) and polite formality (negative politeness) in a single framework. These interactional systematics are assumed to be largely based on universal principles and although the application of the principles differs across cultures, and within cultures, across subcultures and groups, Brown and Levinson see them as the building blocks out of which diverse and distinct social relations are constructed. As the analysis of the plays will show Brown and Levinson's analysis of social relations provides a useful tool for assessing the nature of dramatic interaction by emphasizing the use and often misuse of the strategies of politeness that are significant for the understanding of the plays.

### 4.3. The Socio Psychological Aspect of Communication: Speech-Acts and Social Action

For the purpose of this study it is useful to add to Leech's and Brown and Levinson's approach a description of Watzlawick's work which offers a broader socially and psychologically oriented application of pragmatic principles than a linguistic-pragmatic approach alone could provide.

Before examining Watzlawick's concepts, some general observations should help to determine the role of speech acts within a social context. Speech-acts are not only the concern of linguistics but should also be seen in connection with sociology and psychology since talk is part of the total physical, social, cultural and verbal environment in which it occurs. Speech acts are part of social action and social action is seen as any kind of action that relates to another human activity:

Der Begriff *soziales Handeln* meint jedes Handeln das in einer jeweils spezifischen Bedingungskonstellation von materiellen Substratsbedingungen sowie Kulturelementen und/oder aktuellen Erwartungen stattfindet und diese handelnd interpretiert.<sup>110</sup>

Based on a concept introduced by Habermas, Kreckel differentiates between *instrumental actions* (work) and *communicative actions* (interaction):

Eine typische Form von sozialem Handeln, bei dem der instrumentale Aspekt gegenüber dem kommunikativem überwiegt, ist die produzierende Arbeit; in *reinen* zwischenmenschlichen Interaktionen steht dagegen der kommunikative Aspekt im Vordergrund während der instrumentale Aspekt nur als Hintergrundbedingung wirksam wird.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> R.Kreckel, *Soziologisches Denken Eine kritische Einführung* (Opladen: Leske Verlag und Buderich, 1975), p. 128.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Consequently social acts are mostly a combination of communicative and instrumental acts. Parson's model is based on the interaction between the acting individual, the situation and the individual's attitude towards a particular situation. This attitude is determined by the needs and values the individual brings into a situation. Cooperation between individuals is only possible if the internalised values of the participants are largely congruent which will be the case if they have been socialized into the same cultural context:

Internalisierung [...] bezieht sich auf die Tatsache, daß die in einer Kultur festgelegten Normen oder Werte [...] zu konstituierenden Bestandteilen der Persönlichkeit des Individuums [...] werden. Die von einem Individuum verfolgten Ziele oder Werte leiten sich aus der Kultur her, in der das Individuum sozialisiert worden ist. Ist der Mensch einmal sozialisiert, so kann er nur in Übereinstimmung mit seinen internalisierten Werten handeln.<sup>112</sup>

Parsons' view of the structure of society is transferable to the structure of communication. The reaction of the individuals to a situation is recurrent, regular and predictable. The interactants adapt to each other since they have internalised similar norms and by acting in accordance with each other's expectations, they fulfil the role that has been assigned to them. According to Parsons, behaviour that does not conform to the role is the exception, since role expectations are institutionalized norms and therefore to a great extent internalised:

[...] in den meisten Beziehungen ist der Handelnde nicht als ganzer beteiligt, sondern lediglich mit einem besonders differenzierten Ausschnitt seines gesamten Handelns. Es hat sich eingebürgert, einen solchen Ausschnitt "Rolle" zu nennen [...] Aus der Sicht des

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<sup>112</sup> T. Parsons, 'The Social System', quoted in R. Kreckel, p. 73.



Handelnden ist seine Rolle durch die normativen Erwartungen der Gruppenmitglieder definiert.<sup>113</sup>

The individual may be able to act simultaneously and/or successively in different roles and he may also take part in the decision as to which part he will assume but as soon as the decision is taken, he becomes the bearer of a determined role in a given social situation and is left with little alternative scope. With these general observations in mind, I will examine in the following Watzlawick's theory of communication. Watzlawick and his collaborators examine the organisation of human interaction and look at the structure of communicational processes as a whole. By looking at patterns of interaction it is possible to explore more complex units of communication.

#### 4.3.1 Watzlawick's Theory of Communication

Watzlawick and his collaborators' study, *Pragmatics of Human Communication* has become recognised as a standard work in its field, notwithstanding the different criticisms it has been subject to.<sup>114</sup> Unlike Leech and Brown and Levinson, Watzlawick does not concentrate primarily on linguistic structures but on patterns of interactional behaviour within a broader sociologically and psychologically oriented application of Pragmatic Principles. Watzlawick's communication theory was originally based on a research project

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> I refer in this connection to Andrea Köhler-Ludescher's recent biography *Paul Watzlawick. Die Biografie. Die Entdeckung des gegenwärtigen Augenblicks*, (Bern: Hans Huber Verlag, 2014). See also the book's review by Oliver Pfohlmann 'Paul Watzlawick in einer Biografie. Kommunikations-Künstler mit Kultusstatus', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 17.12.2014. For criticism of Watzlawick's theory see, for instance, Jürgen Ziegler, *Kommunikation als Paradoxyer Mythos* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1977). Ziegler sees Watzlawick's use of theoretical terms as too rigid and predictable. In my view Ziegler's critique seems mainly concerned with extracting the individual axioms without contemplating Watzlawick's theory as a whole and its contribution to further research on communication. See also section 4.4 where I refer in detail to Ziegler's criticism.

concerning the nature, origin and therapeutic treatment of schizophrenia.<sup>115</sup> He concluded that the findings in relation to pathogenic structures are applicable to ‘normal’ relationships when viewed within the context of ongoing interaction.<sup>116</sup> According to Watzlawick’s findings, when psychiatric symptoms are viewed as behaviour appropriate to an ongoing interaction, a frame of reference emerges that is diametrically opposed to the classical psychiatric view. Thus ‘schizophrenia viewed as the incurable and progressive disease of an individual mind and schizophrenia viewed as the only possible reaction to an absurd or untenable communicational context [...] are two entirely different things’.<sup>117</sup>

Watzlawick moves away from the psychoanalytic model that he regards as neglecting the interdependence between the individual and his environment and relates what he terms pathological communication<sup>118</sup> to disturbances that can develop in human communication and not to intrapsychic processes. According to Watzlawick a phenomenon remains inexplicable as long as the range of observation does not include the context in which it occurs. Failure to realize the intricacies of the relationship between an event and the context in which it takes place induces the observer to attribute to the object of study certain properties it

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<sup>115</sup> Watzlawick defines schizophrenia as ‘a psychosis marked by fundamental disturbances in the patient’s perception of reality, concept formations, affects, and consequently, his behaviour in general [...]’. Compare P. Watzlawick et al., ‘Glossary’, p. 286.

<sup>116</sup> Watzlawick’s definition of pathogenicity: ‘The quality of producing or the ability to produce pathological changes or disease’ (Ibid., p. 284).

<sup>117</sup> P. Watzlawick et al., p. 47. A similar approach is found in E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face to Face Behaviour*. Like Watzlawick, Goffman drew part of the data of his work from an observational study of mental health patients. According to Goffman there is ‘no psychotic misconduct that cannot be matched precisely in everyday life by the conduct of persons who are not psychologically ill or considered to be so’ (Compare *Interaction Ritual*, p. 147).

<sup>118</sup> Pathology, as applied to this study, is not based on a full scientific analysis of the concept but will only be applied in a pragmatic-linguistic sense as captured in one part of the definition of this concept in the OED as ‘mental, social or linguistic abnormality or malfunction’.

may not possess. Central to Watzlawick's theory is the concept that the behaviour of an individual takes on a completely new dimension when, instead of taking a nomadic view of the individual, he/she is seen in the context of an ongoing relationship. By turning away from improvable assumptions about the nature of the psychological and directing attention instead to the study of observable manifestations of human interaction, Watzlawick wants to avoid what he sees as a distorted analysis of human behaviour through the artificial isolation of the individual. Watzlawick's research is not based on the personal conflicts of the individual but uncovers conflicts *between* individuals.<sup>119</sup> The medium of these manifestations is human communication and in order to examine communicational patterns, interaction between individuals must be observed directly.

Prior to explaining the framework for analysis that grows out of Watzlawick's study, it is useful to define Watzlawick's use of the term *communication* and its demarcations. The pragmatic aspect of the theory of human communication is simply referred to as 'communication' but the term is also used to name a loosely defined unit of behaviour. A single communicational unit is described both as *communication* or as *message* while a series of messages exchanged between persons will be called *interaction* and the term *patterns of interaction* refers in

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According to Watzlawick the interdependence between the individual and his environment remained a neglected field of psychoanalysis. Freud broke with many concepts of traditional psychology when he introduced his psychoanalytic theory of human behaviour. But even if the so-called *Neo-Freudians* have placed much more emphasis on individual-environment interaction than originally, it was still undervalued. Watzlawick sees a crucial difference between the psychodynamic model which postulates that behaviour is primarily the outcome of the interplay of intrapsychic forces and the theory of organism-interaction based on information: here one organism communicates something to another organism who then reacts with another piece of communicational behaviour. (Compare P. Watzlawick et al. pp. 28-29.)

Watzlawick's own words to 'a still higher-level unit of human communication'.<sup>120</sup>

The sequence described by the term *interaction* is greater than one message but not infinite.

As will emerge from Watzlawick's first axiom (see below), *The Impossibility of not Communicating*, it becomes obvious that 'once we accept all behaviour as communication', message units must be seen as multifaceted compounds that do not involve words only but all paralinguistic phenomena (for instance tone, speed and rhythm of speech, pauses, laughing and sighing, posture, gestures etc.) and, in short, any kind of behaviour within a given context, which qualifies the meaning of other kinds of behaviour.<sup>121</sup>

The various elements that compose these communicational units will produce highly varied and complex permutations ranging from the congruent to the incongruent and the paradoxical. The pragmatic effect of these combinations as identified by Watzlawick, will provide a useful tool to highlight the complexity of the interaction in the plays to be analysed.

A mayor theme in Watzlawick's study, that also influences greatly the analysis of communication in the plays, is the difficulty of communicating about communication. While it is not too difficult to see that syntactic and semantic inconsistencies are essentially similar to pragmatic inconsistencies, we are in the area of pragmatics particularly susceptible to behaviour that is out of context or that shows other kinds of randomness or lack of constraints, which immediately strikes us as more inappropriate than semantic or syntactic errors. Yet when it comes to practical communication we are almost unaware of the rules being

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

followed in successful communication or broken in disturbed communication. We are according to Watzlawick 'in constant communication and yet we are almost completely unable to communicate about communication'.<sup>122</sup> This shows that the patterns followed in communication are less subject to conscious inspection and that statements, cannot always be taken at face value, least of all in the presence of psychopathology. Watzlawick proposes that the rules of interaction may show the same degrees of consciousness that Freud postulated for slips and errors:

1) they may be clearly within a person's awareness; 2) a person may be unaware of them, but able to recognize them when they are pointed out to him; 3) they may be so far from a person's awareness that even if they were defined correctly and brought to his attention he would still be unable to see them. Watzlawick cites Bateson on the different levels of consciousness that according to Bateson's study come into play during interaction:

. . . as we go up the scale of orders of learning, we come into regions of more and more abstract patterning, which are less and less subject to conscious inspection. The more abstract – the more general and formal the premises upon which we put our patterns together – the more deeply sunk these are in the neurological or psychological levels and the less accessible they are to conscious control.<sup>123</sup>

The picture is different to an outside observer to whom it will become clear that the behaviour of interactants shows various degrees of repetitiveness, or redundancy from which tentative conclusions can be drawn and from which he may be able to identify complex patterns of behaviour.

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<sup>122</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., p. 36.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

#### 4.3.1.1 Watzlawick's Axioms of Human Communication

Watzlawick sums up the general properties effective in human communication in five principles which he calls axioms of human communication. Within the framework of these axioms he also examines some of their possible pathologies and their effect on human interaction. Watzlawick's view of pathological communication could be broadly defined as disturbances that can develop in human interaction: that is, given certain principles of communication, Watzlawick examines 'in what ways and with what consequences these principles can be distorted'.<sup>124</sup> The axiomatic properties and the potential pathologies implied by these properties are the elements out of which the complexity of communication is built.

Before going into the analysis of how the axioms of human communication are applied to ongoing interaction, it appears useful to broadly outline Watzlawick's approach to a general theory of systems on which he bases the analysis of human interaction. Watzlawick explains how the properties of communicational processes can be identified in biological, economic or engineering systems and how, despite their widely varying subject matter, the theories of particular systems have many common conceptions that allow for the transfer to a theory of human interaction. One basic principle is that the phenomena appearing in the interrelation between the organisms are basically different from the properties of the single participating organisms. The interaction between organisms means that an exchange of information between organism A, B and C does not simply proceed in a linear form A-B-C, but that information from C will go to A, resulting in a circular flux of information.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

These circles produce feedback and thus every cycle combines *stimulus*, *reaction* and *reinforcement*. In human interaction this would roughly work as follows: a given item of A's behaviour is a stimulus insofar as it is followed by an item contributed by B which is in turn followed by another item contributed by A. But as A's item is sandwiched between two items contributed by B, it is a response. At the same time A's item is a reinforcement as it is followed by an item contributed by B. This exchange of messages between communicants is examined in detail under Watzlawick's axiom *The Punctuation of the Sequence of Events*. It will be explained later how disagreement or acceptance works for the punctuation proposed by one communicant to the other, at this point, however, it should be stated that punctuation organizes behaviour and is therefore vital to ongoing interaction.

In the following a detailed explanation will be given of the general properties or axioms of communication established by Watzlawick that can be observed in a situation in which two or more individuals take part. These relatively isolated examples represent certain specific basic properties and pathologies of human communication out of which the complexity of communication is built.

### *1) The Impossibility of not Communicating*

Behaviour has a basic property which is often overlooked: behaviour has no opposite, one cannot not behave. If it is accepted that all behaviour in an interactional situation has message character, i.e., is communication, it follows that no matter how one might try, one cannot *not* communicate. Activity or inactivity, words or silence all have message value, they influence others and others in turn cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating. The mere absence of talking or of not taking notice of each other is no exception to what has just been said. These attitudes influence

others and are just as much an interchange of communication as an animated discussion. One cannot say that communication only takes place when it is intentional, conscious, or successful, that is when mutual understanding occurs.

The attempt not to communicate will always be made where there is the wish to avoid any kind of commitment. This is also the dilemma of schizophrenia: the patients behave as if they were trying to deny that they are communicating and then find it necessary to deny also that their denial is itself a communication. But it is equally possible that the patient may seem to want to communicate without however accepting the commitment inherent in all communication.

Watzlawick applies the term *schizophrenese* to define a language that leaves it up to the listener to make a choice from among many possible meanings which are not only different from – but may even be incompatible – with one another. This phenomenon however is not limited to schizophrenia but has much wider implications for human interaction: when one interactant wants to avoid the commitment which is inherent in all communication he will try not to communicate. Situations where one of the participants is not prepared to commit himself, and where the bearing this attitude has on the interaction is of significance, are widely represented in the plays to be analysed. Watzlawick illustrates this strategy with the following basic example. When two strangers meet in a place where they cannot avoid each other's presence (for example in an aeroplane) and A does not want to enter into conversation with B, there are two things A cannot do: He cannot physically leave the field and he cannot not communicate. The pragmatics of this communicational context are thus narrowed down to very few possible reactions: rejection, acceptance and disqualification of communication. I will in the following describe these strategies and at the same



time illustrate them with practical examples from Edward Albee's and Martin Walser's plays.

*Rejection of Communication:*

A can make it clear to B that he is not interested in conversation. This is not condoned by the rules of good behaviour and will create a strained silence. A relationship with B has in fact not been avoided. Albee's one-act play *The Zoo Story* presents a situation where the stage instructions alone show the unwillingness of the one character – Peter – to respond to another character's – Jerry's – advances: '(Peter *doesn't notice*), (*anxious to get back to his reading*), (*anxious to dismiss him*), (*he returns to his book*)'. (ZSt pp. 12-13) According to Watzlawick's first axiom, *The Impossibility of not Communicating*, Peter is clearly conveying his intention not to establish a conversation with Jerry.

*Acceptance of Communication:*

A may give in and make conversation. He will in all probability dislike himself and the other person for his weakness for B may not be willing to stop halfway and, once A has started to respond, he will find it increasingly difficult to stop. The stage directions from *The Zoo Story* show how Peter has '*finally decided*)' (ZSt p. 14) to give in and make conversation, although during the course of the interaction his reactions to Jerry's advances are '*(annoyed)*' (ZSt p. 40) and '*(furious)*' (ZSt p. 44).

*Disqualification of Communication:*

A may defend himself by means of a technique which consists in invalidating his own communications or those of his partner, e.g. by consciously or unconsciously depriving them of an unambiguous and straightforward

meaning. He can avail himself of a whole range of semantic possibilities such as self-contradictions, inconsistencies, subject-switches, incomplete sentences, misunderstandings, obscure style, mannerisms, humour, irony and the literal interpretations of metaphor or metaphorical interpretation of literal remarks.

Helmut, the protagonist of *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, resorts to irony and humour to avert Klaus's overfamiliarity and also to show his intellectual superiority as when Klaus asks 'Und was liest ihr denn da immer abends? HELMUT De Sade. SABINE Masoch auch.' to which Klaus can only reply 'Ihr seid mir so zwei.' with Helmut's noncommittal affirmation 'Das stimmt' (*FP* p. 31), leaving open what he really means.

Finally, there is one more response to which a person can resort in order to avoid conversation: he can feign sleepiness, deafness, drunkenness, ignorance of a language or other defects or inabilities which make it impossible for him to enter into communication. By invoking powers or reasons beyond his control, the person availing himself of such a method is really cheating unless he convinces himself that he is at the mercy of forces beyond his control. This however, would just be a way of saying that he has a psychoneurotic symptom.<sup>125</sup> This is the case when in order to avoid meeting Klaus and his wife, Helmut feigns illness: 'Ich habe Kopfweg. Es ist so heiß. So schwül. [...] Sabine. Ich kann nicht' (*FP* p. 13).

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<sup>125</sup> According to Watzlawick: pertaining to an emotional disorder, characterized by its psychogenic nature and its functional (rather than organic) symptom (*psychogenic*: of intrapsychic origin; having an emotional or psychologic origin [...] as opposed to an organic basis). See 'Glossary', P. Watzlawick et al., p. 286.

## 2) *The Content and Relationship Levels of Communication*

Every communication has a *content* and a *relationship* aspect. The content of a message conveys information. At the same time every communication contains another less obvious aspect, that is, an indication as to how the sender wants his message to be understood by the receiver or how he wants the receiver to see the relationship between them. Relationships are seldom consciously and specifically defined. In conflictive relationships the parties concerned fight for their definition with the content level becoming less and less important. In Watzlawick's own words:

Any psychotherapist is familiar with these confusions between the content and relationship aspects of an issue, especially in marital communication, and with the enormous difficulty of diminishing the confusion. While to the therapist the monotonous redundancy of pseudo disagreements between husbands and wives becomes evident fairly quickly, the protagonists usually see every one of them in isolation and as totally new, simply because the practical objective issues involved may be drawn from a wide range of activities, from TV programs, to corn flakes to sex.<sup>126</sup>

And on the particular problem of the complexity of family relations

Watzlawick quotes Koestler:

Family relations pertain to a plane where the ordinary rules of judgment and conduct do not apply. They are a labyrinth of tensions, quarrels and reconciliations, whose logic is self-contradictory, whose ethics stem from a cosy jungle, and whose values and criteria are distorted like the curved space of a self-contained universe.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> P. Watzlawick et al., p. 81.

<sup>127</sup> A. Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (New York, Collins, 1954), p. 86, as quoted by P. Watzlawick, p. 81.

The partners will try again and again to solve their conflicts on different content levels but are unable to communicate about the real problem which lies on the relationship level. This, however, presupposes the ability of interactants to talk about their relationship which in itself is problematic as the confusion between the content and relationship aspect of an issue especially in marital communication presents great difficulties.

### *Definition of Self and Other*

On the relationship level people offer each other a definition of their relationship and by implication of themselves, which in 'normal' people has the function

[...] of constantly rebuilding the self concept, of offering this self concept to others for ratification, and of accepting or rejecting the self-conceptual offerings of others.<sup>128</sup>

Furthermore,

[...] the self-concept is continually rebuilt if we are to exist as people and not as objects, and in the main the self-concept is rebuilt in communicative activity.<sup>129</sup>

It is in the nature of human communication that interactants have three possible responses to each other's self-definition and all three are of great importance for the pragmatics of communication.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>128</sup>

John Cummings, 'Communication, an approach to chronic schizophrenia', in Lawrence Appleby, Jordan M. Scher and John Cumming, editors, *Chronic Schizophrenia, Exploration in Theory and Treatment*, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 106-19, here, p. 113, as quoted by P. Watzlawick et al., p. 84.

<sup>129</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>

Here I refer to my elaborations in section 4.4 on the psychological aspect of Watzlawick's theory. It might seem here that some of Watzlawick's ideas move a long way from a narrow definition of Pragmatics. It is, however, the case that discussion about meaning, psychology and

### *Confirmation*

B can accept and confirm A's definition of self. According to Watzlawick this is probably one of the greatest single factors ensuring mental development and stability. Quite apart from the mere exchange of information, man has to communicate with others for the sake of his own awareness of self since he is unable to maintain his emotional stability in communication with himself only and without confirmation. Watzlawick quotes Martin Buber:

[...] at all its levels, persons confirm one another in a practical way, to some extent or other, in their personal qualities and capacities, and a society may be termed human in the measure to which its members confirm one another [...]<sup>131</sup>

Insufficient confirmation amongst partners and interactants in general is one of the main causes of disruption in human interaction.

How lack of mutual confirmation can become a contributing factor in an unrewarding relationship can also be seen from the analysis of the plays in question. In *A Delicate Balance* Agnes's patronizing attitude shows that she is not prepared to grant Julia, her daughter, the status of a self determining person: 'AGNES (*To Julia.*) You're tired; we'll talk about it after' (*DB* p. 45) or '(*Kindly, but a little patronizing.*) Perhaps you *had* better go upstairs' (*DB* p. 57). The fact that Agnes refuses to take Julia seriously and support her in achieving individuation does not only lead to a disturbed relationship but also hinders Julia's development into an independent human being.

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social behaviour can become blurred in this context. In his book *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) Stephen Levinson maintains that Charles Morris's (1938) broad definition of the term Pragmatics to include psycholinguistics, social linguistics and more is still generally used.

<sup>131</sup> M. Buber, 'Distance and Relation', *Psychiatry*, 20.97-104 (1957) pp. 101-102 as quoted by P. Watzlawick et al., p. 85.

### *Rejection*

The second possible response to A's definition of himself is for B to reject it. Rejection, however, no matter how painful, presupposes at least limited even if antagonistic recognition and therefore does not negate the reality of A's view of himself, as in disconfirmation. When people quarrel the aim of their symmetric escalations is still to be recognised by the partner. One person refuses to acknowledge the other person's self-definition and confronts him with a definition of his own. The semantic content of their communications changes continuously while the relationship level remains unaltered. Such rigid structures of communication account for the inability of the partners to reach an understanding.<sup>132</sup>

In *Die Zimmerschlacht* Felix's and Trude's emotional confrontation escalates to a point where they strongly reject each other's definition of self by claiming that they do not fulfil each other's sexual expectations: Trude accuses Felix of having disappointed her – 'Weil du kein Mann bist' (ZS p.142) – whereas Felix counters in so many words that he is not attracted to Trude but to his friend Benno's twenty-four year old partner. While the purpose to destroy each other's self image remains unchanged, the texts shows how they continue to vent their frustration by hurling insults at each other. Trude and Felix will eventually find a way to live with each other when they find a way to communicate openly about their sexual frustrations.

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<sup>132</sup> Compare section 4.3.1.1 on symmetrical and complementary interaction.

### *Disconfirmation*

The third possibility is the most important one from both pragmatic and psychopathological viewpoints.<sup>133</sup> The phenomenon of disconfirmation is quite different from the outright rejection of the other's definition of self. Watzlawick refers to R.D. Laing who quotes William James:

No more fiendish punishment could be devised, even were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all members thereof.<sup>134</sup>

Such a situation would, according to Watzlawick, lead to a loss of self since *disconfirmation* bears no longer any relation to the truth or falsity of a person's definition of self but negates the reality of the person as a source of this definition. While rejection amounts to the message: 'You are wrong about yourself', disconfirmation means de facto: 'You do not exist'.

This strategy is used in *A Delicate Balance* when Agnes during a discussion with Tobias ignores Claire, robbing her comments of validity, as can be seen from Albee's stage directions: '*Regards CLAIRE for a moment, then decides she – CLAIRE – is not in the room with them. AGNES will ignore CLAIRE's coming comments until otherwise indicated.*' (DB p. 22). Since Claire recognizes that her position in the household hierarchy is lower than Agnes's – 'If we are to live here,

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<sup>133</sup> According to Watzlawick a generic term denoting emotional and/or mental illnesses or disturbances. See P. Watzlawick et al., p. 287. See also p. 96 of this study on pathological communication.

<sup>134</sup> R.D. Laing, *The Self and Others. Further Studies in Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1961), p. 89, as quoted in P. Watzlawick et al., p. 86. I refer to my Introduction where I deal in more detail with R.D. Laing's influence on Watzlawick's theory. R.D. Laing quotes William James whose explanations in *The Principle of Psychology* (1890) are congruent with Watzlawick's view. (William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), Chapter X, 'The Consciousness of Self'). William James's work *Pragmatism, A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, Popular Lectures on Philosophy* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, 1907) albeit with a more philosophical approach can be seen as a foundational text in relation to the pragmatic method.

on Tobias's charity, then we are subject to the will of his wife...' (DB p. 22) – she seeks revenge by making cutting remarks about Agnes – '(to Julia [...]. Your mommy got her pudenda scuffed a couple of times herself 'fore she met old Toby, you know.' (DB p. 50) – that do not conform with how Agnes wants to be perceived.

### *Pragmatic Paradoxes*

The concept of paradox is according to Watzlawick intimately linked with important achievements in the area of logic and mathematics, notably the development of metamathematics or the theory of proofs. We may be inclined to dismiss these concepts as too abstract to be integrated into a system of pragmatic linguistics but Watzlawick shows how there is something in the nature of paradox that is of immediate pragmatic significance. As an extensive examination of paradox in other areas would divert from the purpose of this study, I will quote Watzlawick's definition that 'paradox may be defined as a '*contradiction that follows correct deduction from consistent premises*'<sup>135</sup> and will only refer to the role of paradox in human interaction, i.e. pragmatic paradoxes. These can, according to Watzlawick be divided into paradoxical injunctions and paradoxical predictions. For this study only the former concept is of relevance here because of its behavioural implications while the concept of paradoxical predictions refers to more abstract situations which are not present in the plays to be analysed.

### *Paradoxical Injunctions*

There are situations where a person is forced to doubt her own perceptions on the content level so as not to jeopardise a relationship. People who find

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<sup>135</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., p. 188.



themselves in this situation are in an ‘untenable position’. Requests for paradoxical behaviour are more frequent than is generally assumed. Paradoxes in human communication can create an impossible situation. The following scene from Albee’s play *The Zoo Story*<sup>136</sup> would appear to provide an appropriate model for the analysis of this situation and its possible alternatives.

When Jerry asks the surprised Peter who is sitting alone at one end of a bench to ‘Move over’ (ZSt p. 40) and make space for him, the latter first ‘shifts a little’ (ZSt p. 40) and, when Jerry demands more space, he ‘moves some more’ (ZSt p. 40) so as to avoid disturbances in their interaction. Jerry’s demands become more aggressive ‘he pokes PETER on the arm’ (ZSt p. 40), ‘Pokes Peter harder’ (ZSt p. 40) etc. and while Peter first reacts in a ‘friendly’ fashion (ZSt p. 40), he soon begins ‘to be annoyed’ (ZSt p. 40) and will – after having gone through stages of ‘disgust and impotence’ (ZSt p. 43) – be ‘furious’ and ‘almost crying’ (ZSt p. 44). On the basis of this example the paradoxical structures and different behavioural alternatives in such a situation can be analysed. Since Jerry’s message is paradoxical – he demands that Peter make room for him although the latter is sitting at the very end of the bench – any reaction to this message within the framework established by Jerry must also be paradoxical. It is simply impossible to react consistently and logically in a contradictory and illogical context. As long as Peter remains in the context imposed on him by Jerry, he has two alternatives: he can either give in to Jerry’s behaviour by suppressing his own perceptions of the situation or he can refuse to give in to Jerry’s insinuations. Peter makes use of both possibilities, but since Jerry holds on to his position he finally feels helpless and can only react with anger and tears. It will eventually come to a symmetric

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<sup>136</sup> E. Albee, *The Zoo Story*, abbreviated to ZSt, see footnote 73.

escalation and to accusations of maliciousness and madness. Jerry goes as far as invalidating his own communications when to Peter's direct request for an explanation – 'Stop it! What's the matter with you?' (ZSt p. 41) – he replies 'I'm crazy you bastard' (ZSt p. 41).<sup>137</sup> By declaring that he is not really responsible for his actions, he denies all commitment inherent in his previous communications. The situation would have been totally different if Peter had not remained within the limits established by Jerry but had instead made a statement on the situation itself, that is, if he had not reacted to the content of Jerry's communication but had communicated on the communication itself. In doing so he would have stepped outside of the context established by Jerry's communication and would not have been trapped within the dilemma. But this step is generally not easy. Above all, as has been explained before, it is difficult to communicate on communication. Peter would have to explain the reasons why the situation is untenable and this alone would be no small task. As will be seen later, this is still more difficult in family situations where the complexity and the emotional interweaving of relations between the individuals barely allow for such a step. Another reason why metacommunication would not be a simple solution, is that it would be easy for Jerry to block Peter's metacommunication, preventing him from stepping out of an – albeit untenable – situation, by regarding his attempt as further proof of his impertinent attempts to secure the bench for himself.

This is also the essence of a double bind situation which can be described as follows. Two or more partners are involved in an intense relationship where the

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<sup>137</sup> On pathological communication Watzlawick explains through a practical example how it becomes possible for a person to deny any or all aspects of a message: 'If pressed for an answer to what she (*the patient*: my italics) had meant by her remark, the patient [...] could conceivably have said casually 'Oh, I don't know, I guess I must be crazy' (P. Watzlawick et al., p. 73).

message sent by one partner is so structured that a) it asserts something, b) it asserts something about its own assertion and c) these two assertions are mutually exclusive. Thus the message must be disobeyed to be obeyed and the recipient has the more or less overt prohibition to show any awareness of the contradiction or the real issue involved. In a double bind situation the one partner will find himself punished for correct perceptions, and defined as 'bad' for insinuating that there is a discrepancy between what he perceives and what he should perceive. To illustrate the theory Watzlawick quotes an example from A. Johnson's et al., studies on schizophrenia, describing childrens' reactions to their parent's anger. The parent denies that he is angry and insists that the child also deny it, so that the child is faced with the dilemma of whether to believe the parent or his own senses. If he believes his senses he maintains a firm grasp on reality. If he believes the parent, he keeps intact a relationship that is necessary to him.

### 3) *The Punctuation of the Sequence of Events*

The nature of a relationship is dependent upon the punctuation of the communicational sequence of events. This cannot be observed in relation to one speech act but only on the basis of an ongoing interaction. What looks like an uninterrupted exchange of messages between the interactants is in reality subject to a structure which Watzlawick terms punctuation of sequence of events.<sup>138</sup>

Mention has already been made of the fact that behaviour is stimulus and response as well as reinforcement.<sup>139</sup> A given item of A's behaviour is a stimulus

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<sup>138</sup> In this connection Watzlawick makes reference to the work of Bateson and Jackson who coined the term which Watzlawick incorporated into his own theory. See Gregory Bateson and Don D. Jackson, 'Some Varieties of Pathogenic Organization', in David McK Rioch, ed., *Disorders of Communication*, Volume 42, (Baltimore: Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Disease, 1964), pp. 273-274, as quoted by P. Watzlawick et al., pp. 54-56.

<sup>139</sup> Compare section 4.3.1.1. of this study, 'The Impossibility of not Communicating'.

insofar as it is followed by an item contributed by B and that in turn is followed by another item contributed by A. But A's behaviour is also a reaction, since it is embedded between two items of behaviour. Equally A's behaviour is also reinforcement, since it follows an item of B's behaviour. This interaction constitutes a chain of overlapping triadic links, each of which is a stimulus-response-reinforcement sequence.

In a long sequence of interchange the people concerned will in fact punctuate the sequence so that it will appear that one or the other has the initiative, dominance, dependency or the like. In other words they will set up between them patterns of interchange – on which they may or may not be in agreement – which act as practical rules that organize communicational behaviour. The definition of a role is dependant on the willingness of the interactants to accept a punctuation. It organises behaviour and is therefore an important part of any human relationship. Disagreement on how to punctuate the sequence of events is at the root of countless relationship struggles. These conflicts often occur in cases where the partners within a relationship wrongly suppose that the other (or the others) not only has (have) the same amount of information as they have themselves but that the other(s) must draw the same conclusions from this information.

At the root of punctuational conflicts often lies the firmly established and unquestioned conviction of the individual that there is only one reality, the world as he sees it, and that any view that differs from his own must be due to the other person's ill will. Helmut's and Klaus's interaction in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* shows how disagreement on punctuation can lead to interactional impasses. Having been together at school and university, Klaus and Helmut now middle-aged, meet again with both expressing divergent views on many elements of shared experience:

Klaus's detailed description of their mutual erotic experiments – 'einer der schönsten Augenblicke unseres erotischen Vorfrühlings' – is contested by Helmut – 'Kompliment Klaus! Du siehst, Sabine glaubt schon, was du erzählst sei tatsächlich passiert' – (*FP* pp. 35-36).

Helmut sees his attitude as a defense against Klaus's overfamiliar and presumptuous behaviour, while Helmut's withdrawal only ignites Klaus's determination to win Helmut over and force his own lifestyle upon him. Their interaction consists of an exchange of monotonous messages on the relationship level (the content level conveys the information, the relationship level indicates how this information is to be understood) with Klaus's approach becoming more and more daring and Helmut's more withdrawn, while both characters perceive themselves as reacting to and not as determining each other's behaviour. Thus to assume that Klaus's behaviour causes Helmut's attitude is to ignore the effect Helmut's behaviour has on Klaus. As the development of the play reveals, their mutual attitudes can be seen as a reaction towards each other's behaviour. Klaus conveys the impression of having achieved a highly successful philosophy of life which in reality conceals insecurity and disappointment and Helmut who appears to be immune to Klaus's existential approach, in truth feels threatened by Klaus's audacious approach to life. These discrepancies in the understanding of the punctuation of communicational sequences will eventually lead to conflicts. Here it comes to the point where Helmut refuses to help Klaus who is in danger of drowning. They are vicious circles that cannot be broken unless and until communication itself becomes the subject of communication. A communication on communication is generally called a metacommunication and takes place on the relationship level. As has been explained in the previous section every

communication has a content and a relationship aspect, the former conveys the ‘data’ of the communication, the latter how the communication is to be taken. The relationship aspect is a communication about communication. Whatever people may communicate on the content level the underlying concept will be how they see themselves in relation to the other person and, in the main, the self concept is continually rebuilt in communicative activity. If Klaus and Helmut had been more responsive by trying to understand what motivated the other’s behaviour instead of desperately holding on to their own attitude, they could have avoided a breakdown of their relationship. Helmut realizes only too late that he has misunderstood Klaus’s behaviour and has failed to react to the underlying signs on the relationship level: ‘Ich habe gedacht, er will auftrumpfen. Mich blamieren. Ich habe überhaupt nichts wahrgenommen von ihm. Ich war zu. Total zu’ (*FP* p. 75).

### *The Self-fulfilling Prophecy*

Watzlawick sees the self-fulfilling prophecy as the most interesting phenomenon in the area of punctuation: it is behaviour that brings about in others the reaction to which the behaviour would be an appropriate reaction.<sup>140</sup> For example, if a person acts on the premise that he is disliked by another person he will behave in a defensive and aggressive manner which will provoke an unsympathetic reaction, confirming his original premise. The individual’s attitude forces others into certain behavioural responses. What makes this pattern a problem of *punctuation* is that the person concerned sees himself as reacting to other’s attitudes and not as provoking them.

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<sup>140</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., p. 99.

#### 4) *Digital and Analogic Communication*

Digital communication works with signs that are attached to objects on the basis of semantic conventions outside of which there exists no other correlation between a word and the thing it stands for.<sup>141</sup> Whenever a word is used to *name* something it is obvious that the relation between the name and the thing named is an arbitrarily established one. In analogic communication on the other hand, there is a particular likeness between the expression and the object it stands for.<sup>142</sup>

Watzlawick explains the difference between the two modes of communication by showing how no amount of listening to a foreign language on the radio will yield an understanding of the language, whereas some basic information could be fairly easily derived from watching sign language and movements, even when used by a person of a very different culture.<sup>143</sup> Analogic communication is virtually all nonverbal communication in the broadest sense: it comprises posture, gesture, facial expression, voice inflection, sequence, rhythm and tone of words and any other verbal manifestation of which the human being is capable, as well as the communicational implications of the context in which the interaction takes place. Man is the only organism known to use both the analogical and the digital modes of communication. On the one hand it would be impossible to transmit knowledge and information from one person to another without digital language. And yet in the area of relationships we rely on analogic communication. Since every

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<sup>141</sup> With the possible and insignificant exception of onomatopoeic words.

<sup>142</sup> It should be noted that Watzlawick's use of the terms analogue and digital differs from a now established use linked to technologies mostly employed in the electronic transmission of information. In the context it does not appear to be helpful to analyze detailed etymological parallels other than common reliance on coding in communication termed as digital. The term analogue generally describes forms of information transmission which for example through continuous electronic signals mirror (are analogue to) the information they are transmitting. Contemporary usage interferes with Watzlawick's usage making it less easy to grasp.

<sup>143</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., p. 62.

communication has a content and relationship aspect (see section 4.3.1.1 point 2), it becomes clear that digital and analogic forms of communication do not only exist alongside one another other but also complement each other. Digital communication can be reinforced or invalidated through analogic behaviour (body language). Analogic communication plays a vital part in all three plays and is often indicated through stage directions but also by punctuation marks, as the following examples will show. In *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, Helmut's speech maintains the same tone throughout the play: *'Im Gegensatz zu Klaus, dramatisiert Helmut nicht, sondern spricht flach, schnell, leicht'* (FP p. 29). The digital aspect, that which is verbally expressed, is reinforced by the analogic communication, as Helmut's tone of speech expresses a sober, rather indifferent attitude that contrasts with and reacts to Klaus's overwhelming way of speaking. Analogic messages on the other hand can also invalidate spoken words. In *A Delicate Balance* when the friends seek approval of their intention to stay with Agnes and Tobias, Agnes's verbal affirmation – *'(A deep breath control.) . . . you did the right thing . . . of course'* (DB p. 31) – is rendered doubtful by her voice inflections and the ellipsis it contains.

Analogical messages are invocations of relationship, and are therefore proposals regarding the future rules of a relationship. A character's behaviour can propose love, respect, disregard, etc. but it is up to the receiver to attribute negative or positive value to these proposals. This is the source of countless relationship conflicts.

##### 5) *Symmetrical and Complementary Interaction*

Human interaction can be described as symmetrical or complimentary, referring to relationships based on either equality or difference. In the first case



the partners tend to mirror each other's behaviour and thus their interaction can be termed symmetrical. In the second case one partner's behaviour complements that of the other. In a complementary relationship we find two different positions. One partner takes the superior or what has been described as the 'one up' position and the other takes the inferior or 'one down' position. These terms are not equated with good or bad, strong or weak since a complimentary relationship may be set by the social or cultural context (as in the cases of mother and infant, student and teacher). In healthy relationships the two forms complement each other in mutual alternation and in different areas. This has a stabilising effect and it is necessary that the partners' behaviour is symmetrical in some areas and complementary in others.

These relationship patterns can be identified only in relationships between successive statements since an isolated statement taken out of context, can be neither symmetric nor complementary. Only after the reaction of the partner and a reaction to his reaction have taken place can a communication be classified. A complementary relationship may be set by the social or cultural context but it may also be the relationship style of a particular dyad.

Symmetrical and complementary relationship patterns which stabilize each other and change from one pattern to the other and back again are important homeostatic mechanisms, a concept that Watzlawick equates with stability and equilibrium.<sup>144</sup> In the pathological versions of symmetric and complementary interaction on the other hand, no such exchange takes place which in extreme

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<sup>144</sup> As explained on p. 61, Watzlawick sees human interaction as a system and applies the properties of systems to human communication. *Homeostasis* is such a property, equated with stability or equilibrium. A detailed explanation follows in section 4.3.1.2 *The Organization of Human Interaction, Feedback and Homeostasis*.

cases leads either to symmetrical escalation or rigid complementarity. It is characteristic of a symmetrical escalation that each interactant wants to be in a 'one up' position. This accounts for its typical escalating quality. If a point is reached where the stability of a relationship is lost, it can be observed how people go through a pattern of frustration until they eventually stop from sheer emotional and physical exhaustion and maintain an uneasy truce to gather strength for a new attack.

In the plays to be analysed symmetrical escalations work as a release from an emotional climax. An impasse is reached where the characters reject each other's definition of their relationship often by hurling insults at each other with each trying to be more imaginative than the other.<sup>145</sup> When a symmetrical relationship breaks down we mostly observe rejection rather than disconfirmation of the other person.<sup>146</sup>

In *Die Zimmerschlacht* there are extensive interchanges where Trude and Felix hurl insults at each other of which this extract is an example:

TRUDE Spitzfindigkeit, das liegt dir. In der Logik, da hast du was los, aber einen Mundgeruch, daß man sich die Nase an den Hinterkopf wünscht.  
 FELIX So. Ich hätte also einen Mundgeruch.  
 TRUDE Den du natürlich selbst nicht mehr bemerkst.  
 FELIX Und du? Siehst du, Trude, das hab ich davon, daß ich alles in mich hineinschlucke. Deine Mangel absorbiere ich stillschweigend wie der Filter den Schmutz [...] (ZS p. 139)

The escalating quality of the couple's symmetrical interaction is provoked by outside circumstances: the appearance within their circle of middle aged friends of

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<sup>145</sup> Patterns such as the ones described above are found in *Die Zimmerschlacht* pp. 138-139 and *A Delicate Balance* pp. 21-22.

<sup>146</sup> Rejection and disconfirmation as seen by Watzlawick is explained in section 4.3.1.1, 'The Content and Relationship Levels of Communication'.

a young woman who is in a relationship with Benno, upsets an established pattern of interaction and leads to the outbreak of frustrations that they would normally control.

It has been explained before that rejection, however punitive, presupposes at least a limited recognition of the other individual's reality. The pathological versions of complementary interaction, on the other hand, lead to disconfirmation rather than rejection and are therefore more important from a psychological point of view than the more or less open fights in symmetrical relations. A typical problem in a complementary relationship arises when A demands that B confirms a definition of A's self and this is at variance with the way B sees him. This places B in a very peculiar dilemma: he must change his own definition of self into one that complements and thus supports A's since it is in the nature of complementary relationships that a self-definition can only be maintained if the partner plays the specific complementary role.

Rigid complementary structures where one character has the upper hand and sets the tone for the interaction prevent the other(s) from stepping out of a role that has been imposed on him/them. This constitutes an impediment for the development of a healthy and open relationship. In *Ein fliehendes Pferd* Hel's description of her relationship to Klaus shows such a rigid complementary pattern: 'Ich habe nicht leben dürfen. Das hat er nicht gestattet. Ich habe mich für das, was er gemacht hat, mehr interessieren müssen als er selber' (*FP* p. 67).

Complementary relationships play an important role between parents and children: the same pattern which is biologically and emotionally vital during the child's early phase can become an impediment for the further development if adequate changes are not made as that child develops into adulthood.

In *A Delicate Balance* Agnes's patronizing attitude towards Julia – 'Julia! Please!' or 'Will you be still?' (*FP* p. 33) and 'You're tired; we'll talk about it after . . . .' (*FP* p. 45) are examples of Agnes's inability to accept Julia's maturity by holding on to a pattern where Julia is forced to play the complimentary role. It becomes clear from the development of the play that Agnes opposes Julia's independence as it would undermine her authority and threaten a pattern of interaction that serves to protect the albeit precarious balance which Agnes is set on maintaining.

#### **4.3.1.2 The Organization of Human Interaction**

As pointed out earlier Watzlawick applies the properties of open systems to the analysis of human communication processes. A system is according to Hall and Fagen 'a set of objects together with relationships between the objects and their attributes'<sup>147</sup> Open systems are defined as systems in which matter is exchanged allowing interaction between their internal elements and their environment, while closed systems on the other hand are isolated from their surroundings by a boundary that allows no transfer of matter or energy. Watzlawick sees the system of human interaction as an organic system and organic systems are open, meaning that they exchange materials, energies and information with their environments. Watzlawick transfers the basic properties of open systems to the analysis of communicational processes. Essential to Watzlawick's theory is, as mentioned earlier, the fact that the interaction between organisms A, B and C does not simply proceed in a linear form A-B-C, rather information from C will go to A resulting in a circular flux of information. This

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<sup>147</sup> A.D. Hall, and R.E. Fagen, 'Definition of System' *General Systems Yearbook*, 1:18-28, p. 156, as quoted by Watzlawick, p. 120.

structure helps to explain the organization of interaction within the patterns of ongoing communication as for instance when considering cumulative symmetrical and complimentary interaction or the self-fulfilling prophecy which encompass more than one particular punctuation of a communicational sequence. I will explain by means of Watzlawick's first axiom 'We cannot not communicate' how this circular process takes place: once we accept that all behaviour is communication we recognize that even the shortest possible unit does not deal with a monophonic message unit alone but rather with a multifaced compound of many behavioural modes – verbal, postural, contextual etc. – all of which qualify the meaning of all subsequent messages.<sup>148</sup> This explains Watzlawick's approach which shifts from an individual to an interpersonal level for viewing therapy problems and solutions. Here I would argue that if we assume with Watzlawick that the notions of human behaviour are to be analysed with the properties of a circular system we do not take into account that there may be some hidden mental deficits or psychological conditions that cause one of the participants to shut down or behave in a way that is not adapted to the situation. This could however be attributed to extreme clinical conditions, as generally, despite the unwillingness of an individual to pursue a conversation, interaction will still take place. In the analysis of dramatic dialogue which presents problems of human relations within a theatre performance I found the detailed explanation of the axioms that constitute the essence of Watzlawick's theory significant for my analysis of the plays. As suggested above, they also provide the tools for looking at longer sequences of communication. Investigating in detail the concepts relating to longer messages over a set period of time would unnecessarily extend

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<sup>148</sup> Compare Watzlawick et al., p. 59.

the analysis and lead to repetitions. Nevertheless, for a more exhaustive understanding of Watzlawick's theory, I will in the following give a brief overview of some concepts which I consider significant and that I shall illustrate with examples from the plays analyzed.

### *1) Wholeness and Nonsummativity*

As noted earlier, a system cannot be taken as the sum of its parts since a formal analysis of artificially isolated parts would destroy the very object of interest. It is necessary to neglect the parts for the *gestalt* since the relation of two or more elements produces a variety of complex new elements. Applied to human interaction this would mean that the analysis of a family for example is not the sum of the analysis of its individual members. There are characteristics of the interactional system that transcend the qualities of individual members.

### *2) Feedback and Homeostasis*

As explained, the flow of information amongst the different parts of a system and its environment does not proceed simply in a linear but in a circular form. In this way the inputs introduced into the system are acted upon and modified by it. Since various somewhat different definitions of the term have been put forward, Watzlawick sums up homeostasis as the steady state or stability of a system.<sup>149</sup> The stability of a system is basically maintained by negative feedback mechanisms but must incorporate negative and positive feedback. The nature of the input as well as the feedback mechanisms are taken into account since feedback has an important place in the maintenance of stability and equilibrium. In the case of negative feedback this information is used to decrease the output

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<sup>149</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., p. 146.

deviation from a set norm – hence the adjective negative – while in the case of positive feedback the same information acts as a measure for amplification of the output deviation and is positive in relation to the already existing trend towards a standstill.

For human interaction negative feedback plays an important role in achieving and maintaining the stability of relationships. Positive feedback implies change and may lead to the loss of stability and equilibrium. It would on the other hand be inaccurate to conclude simply that negative feedback is desirable and positive feedback disruptive. The main point is that interpersonal systems like friendships, some business or professional relationships and especially marital and familial relations may be viewed as feedback loops since the behaviour of each person is affected by the behaviour of each other person. Input into the system may be amplified into change or counteracted to maintain stability depending on whether the feedback mechanisms are positive or negative. The structure of family relations would appear to offer a practical example. All families that stay together are characterized by some degree of negative feedback, that is by some fundamental stability or rules. However, there must also be learning and growth in a family, and it is here that a pure homeostatic model is inadequate since the effects of change in a family structure are closer to positive feedback. The differentiation of behaviour, learning and the ultimate growth and departure of children all indicate that while, on one hand, the family is balanced by homeostasis, there are important simultaneous changes in operation and a model of family interaction must incorporate negative and positive feedback. Predominantly negative feedback, on the other hand, is often a salient feature of disturbed family relations where remarkable ability to maintain the status quo is

demonstrated. Watzlawick quotes Jackson who explains how the existence of psychiatric patients is often essential for the stability of a family system. Less extreme but in the same line of thought is the example in Albee's *A Delicate Balance* where Claire's attempts to step out of her role as an alcoholic are resisted by Agnes who fears for her own position as the 'fulcrum' (DB p. 48) that maintains the stability of the family system. Clearly this is an undesirable type of stability, since interpersonal systems must be distinguished by both stability and change. Differentiation of behaviour, reinforcement and learning as well as the ultimate growth and departure of children all indicate that while on one hand the family is balanced by homeostasis, a model of family interaction must also be open to change. Negative and positive feedback mechanisms must occur in specific forms of interdependence or complementarity.

To illustrate the above Watzlawick applies an analogy to a household boiler thermostat: when the thermostat setting is changed there is a difference in the behaviour of the system as a whole. Internal changes, (such as age and maturation both of parents and children) may change the setting of a system, either gradually from within or drastically from without as the social environment impinges on these changes. At one level a deviation in the form of behaviour outside the accepted range is counteracted. At another level change occurs over time and may eventually lead to a new setting or calibration of the system.<sup>150</sup>

The inability of the characters to accept changes and to readjust their behaviour is a main concern in the plays. For fear of endangering their own position the players hold on to established patterns of interaction, avoiding

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<sup>150</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., 'Calibration and Step-Function', p. 147.



conflictive situations, at the same time jeopardizing the development and independence of the other characters.

### 3) *Ongoing Relationships, Limitation and Relationship Rules*

It will be recalled that in every communication the participants offer to each other definitions of their relationship, or more forcefully stated, each seeks to determine the relationship. Each responds to the other with his definition which may confirm, reject or modify that of the other. In an ongoing interaction the definition of a relationship cannot be left unresolved or fluctuating. If the process did not stabilize, the wide variations, the inability to define the relationship with any exchange, would lead to its dissolution. Watzlawick refers to Hall and Fagen's definition of systems characterized by stability as 'a system stable with respect to certain of its variables if these variables tend to remain within defined limits'.<sup>151</sup> Pathological families arguing endlessly over relationship issues illustrate, on the one hand, this necessity although, on the other, Watzlawick suggests that there are limits even to their dispute and that there is often dramatic regularity in their arguments.

This regularity contributes to the stabilization and what Watzlawick sees as the rules on which the relationship is based. For an outsider it is recognizable by the redundancies that occur on the relationship level even if over a diverse range of content areas. The text of *A Delicate Balance* indicates that Claire's and Agnes's constant bickering, Julia's returning home after every failed marriage, Claire's alcoholism and Tobias's lack of commitment are part of the family system. Only the presence of Harry and Edna and their intention to live with them

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<sup>151</sup> A.D. Hall and R.E. Fagen, 'Definition of System', *General Systems Yearbook*, 1:18-28 (1956), as quoted by P. Watzlawick et al., p. 129.

destabilizes the interactional system, even leading to a violent reaction on Julia's part – ([...] JULIA *appears in the archway, [...] her hair is wild , her face is tear-streaked; she carries TOBIAS' pistol [...]* – (DB pp. 63-64). The final admission that they are unable to rise to the challenge of taking Harry and Edna into the family unit suggests a return to the former system of interaction.

#### 4.3.1.3 Final Observations

Watzlawick's investigation into human interaction is significant for the understanding of human behaviour. He draws together the existing findings on behavioural research and gives them systematic formulation in several axioms based on the pragmatics of human communication. Watzlawick then attempts to integrate communication and its terminology into a convincing and comprehensive metacommunicative model. He views communication as a circular interactional process where constant feedback leads either to a reinforcement of a point of view or can inspire a learning process and a change of attitude. Language is seen not only as a source of information but also functions on a relationship level, i.e. what partners intend to communicate is equally part of the message.

Watzlawick examines how ongoing interaction works, basing a chapter of his work on the practical application of some of his communicational structures for an analysis of Albee's drama *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Some of his conclusions in relation to the play will be examined later in this thesis.<sup>152</sup> The theory is useful for the assessment and differentiation of forms of apparent or superficial communication from authentic and successful interaction. Using the theory together with Leech's and Brown and Levinson's studies on pragmatic

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<sup>152</sup> See also my footnote 46.

linguistics that offer specific concepts for the analysis of interaction, this research aims at providing a thorough examination on the communication in the plays as well as contributing to an insightful appreciation of human communication.

## 4.4 Summary

Before passing on to the actual analysis of the plays it would seem useful to give a brief account of the main properties that characterise the theoretical works on which my research is based with regard to their suitability for the analysis of dramatic interaction and in the process also to outline the similarities and differences between naturally occurring language and literary and specifically dramatic language.

Common to all three studies is a shift in emphasis from the preoccupation with speaker identity to a focus on patterns of verbal interaction as the expression of social relationships. Consequently the frameworks outlined here have grown out of approaches to communication which have become the defining principles of pragmatics, a discipline that, as has been explained, studies how speakers use and understand language in actual situations. The basic principles that constitute the approach to pragmatics have been explained in connection with the individual theories but it seems reasonable to give a brief resume of their main features in connection with their application to the plays to be analysed.

The units of conversation used in the study of talk are rooted in the speech act, in particular the illocutionary act as defined by Austin and Searle.<sup>153</sup> While Austin and Searle looked at communication from a speaker's point of view, Grice was more interested in the hearer's perspective. Starting with the fact that

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<sup>153</sup> Compare section 3.1, 'The Development of Pragmatics'.

speakers often imply or mean more than they say, Grice developed a theory of how hearers are able to derive these unsaid meanings through what Grice calls implicatures. In order to show how these implicatures work Grice set up the CP and its maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. Grice suggests that people in conversation generally assume that both they themselves and everyone else operates with these principles in mind. The assumption that the speaker is behaving cooperatively enables him to flout one or more of the maxims of the CP prompting the hearer to seek an interpretation that goes beyond the utterance.<sup>154</sup>

Utterances that are based on implicatures because they mean more or something different from what they say, are significant for the examination of dramatic structures, be it on the level of interaction between the characters or between writers and readers. In drama as in ordinary conversation, communication involves an addresser who sends a message to an addressee. On one level drama shares this structure with everyday conversation and on another level of discourse drama, as Susan Mandala puts it, is ‘arranged to be overheard on purpose’<sup>155</sup>. This formulation suggests that audiences remain distanced from the play’s action and clearly other kinds of response are possible, such as empathetic involvement, for example. However, it is certainly a feature of much dramatic that as characters speak to each other the playwright is speaking to an audience and implicatures generated at one level (e.g. between the playwright and the audience) may not be generated at the other level (between the characters).<sup>156</sup> Audiences are likely to interpret interactions between the characters through their deliberate failures to

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<sup>154</sup> Compare H.P. Grice, ‘Logic and Conversation’ in P. Cole and J. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics Vol.3: Speech Acts*. (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41-58.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Discourse Analysis and the Analysis of Drama’ in Carter, R. and Simpson, P., eds, *Language, Discourse and Literature* (London: Uwin Hyman, 2003), as quoted by S. Mandala p. 86

<sup>156</sup> S. Mandala, p. 86.

observe the maxims or even through stage directions (whether indicated in the text or realised on the stage) that have the purpose of raising the audience's suspicion as to how the plot will develop, knowledge that is often not shared by the characters. Yet, while the author is in a position to determine the interaction, he may not be able to influence how the reader/viewer sees the play and how he identifies with the characters.

As has been explained, both Leech as well as Brown and Levinson enlarge the Gricean framework with their own additional concepts to account for situations which in both their views are not sufficiently explained by Grice's CP and its maxims alone.<sup>157</sup> Leech's work, *The Principles of Pragmatics*, aims at extending the model of Grice's CP by developing and illustrating interpersonal rhetorics where the PP and the numerous additional principles that, according to Leech, are 'parasitic' on the CP and the PP, play a considerable role for the description of pragmatic force. Principles and maxims like irony, banter, hyperbolic, litotes or the phatic maxim which are based on implicatures because they mean more or something different from what they say, are significant for the examination of language in the plays.

Brown and Levinson in their work *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* also acknowledge the role of the Gricean assumptions: similar to Grice they assume that speakers are expectant of cooperation in their conversations and their study on how and why speakers flout Grice's CPs and its maxims is based on observance or non-observance of rules of politeness.

Based on practical examples, Brown and Levinson set up a theory that explains why and how in their view speakers diverge from short, direct and maximally

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<sup>157</sup> Compare this study: Leech, section 4 and Brown and Levinson, section 4.2.

efficient messages. They propose that concerns of politeness are the reasons why speakers realize given acts in discourse. Politeness is central to Brown and Levinson's study and is based on the interactants' mutual awareness of face sensitivity that consists in avoiding embarrassment, humiliation or simply loss of face in relation to each other, in other words what Brown and Levinson define as a face threatening act, abbreviated in their work to FTA. How this awareness, that is the thrust of Brown and Levinson's work, is negotiated has been amply discussed in section 4.2 but at this point I would like to draw attention to the significance of Brown and Levinson's theory for the analysis of the plays in question. Speakers have, according to Brown and Levinson, a socially manifested face that has two aspects: the want to be free from imposition which they call negative face and the want to be approved and socially liked which they call positive face. Speakers are polite when they structure their speech acts with respect to positive and negative face needs. Brown and Levinson's basic division between Negative Politeness and Positive Politeness and the numerous strategies resulting from their framework provide for the analysis of a large number of interactional situations significant for the understanding of the plays to be interpreted. Their work on Negative Politeness for instance, is particularly useful for the analysis of *A Delicate Balance* and *Ein fliehendes Pferd*. Negative Politeness strategies that are characterised by formality and restraint, maximizing social distance, are over-emphasized by Agnes in *A Delicate Balance* and by Helmut in *Ein fliehendes Pferd*. In both plays this leads to a situation that distorts communication and prevents the formation of a real relationship between the characters.

Watzlawick looks at the structure of communicational processes as a whole, revealing how a series of message exchanges results in patterns of interaction that define the nature of a relationship. Watzlawick proposes a number of axioms to identify in what way and with what consequences communicational strategies work when seen in the context of ongoing relationships. Watzlawick's axioms that cover successful as well as pathological structures of behaviour are significant for the understanding of the plays to be analysed.

As in most scientific or critical analysis the tools and pre-existing theories on which we draw are used for their efficiency in pursuing a research goal. To an extent certain criticism of the theories can usefully be left aside as long as this does not impact on the validity of the research presented. The following analysis of the plays and the conclusions I draw from them confirm the overall benefit of applying pragmatic theories to literary analysis. This study would however not be complete without considering the criticism that has been levelled at certain aspects of the theories applied.

Geoffrey Leech's *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983) along with Steven Levinson's *Pragmatics* published in the same year as well as Brown and Levinson's *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* (1987) have frequently been cited as the most influential frameworks to emerge in sociolinguistic research.<sup>158</sup> Since their original formulation both theories have been equally influential and proved equally useful. The fact that they are subject to criticism emphasizes the fact that they spark continuing debate and research.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Levinson, Stephen C., *Pragmatics*.

<sup>159</sup> See Jonathan Culpeper, *Geoffrey Leech 1936-2014 The Pragmatic Legacy* <[https://ipra.uantwerpen.be/main.aspx?c=\\*HOME&n=1486](https://ipra.uantwerpen.be/main.aspx?c=*HOME&n=1486)> [accessed October 27, 2016].

Leech develops a maxim-based view of politeness where the cooperative principle accounts for *how* people convey indirect meanings and the politeness principle and its maxims account for *why* people convey indirect meanings. It could be argued that the proliferation of maxims generated within Leech's framework are too unconstrained to allow for the recognition of an impolite meaning, making it difficult, in Leech's analysis, for the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of the speaker's indirect utterance. This issue has been raised by Brown and Levinson in their work. They maintain that Leech's invention of a maxim for every irregularity would make it difficult for the hearer ever to arrive at the offensive point of a communication. It could equally be argued, though, that Brown and Levinson's framework of positive and negative strategies likewise contains a proliferation of possibilities, making it no easier for the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of the interlocutor's message indirectly than it is when Leech's framework is applied.<sup>160</sup>

My own view is that both Leech's and Brown and Levinson's comprehensive pragmatic theories are based on the identification of a proliferation of redressive strategies that contribute to the development of conversation whether successful or not. These strategies make interaction based on the expression of open undisguised feelings difficult. Leech recognizes that pragmatic principles are regulative rather than constitutive.<sup>161</sup> As has been explained it is through redressive strategies, which Grice terms conversational implicatures that speakers often 'mean more than what they say'.<sup>162</sup> Pragmatics, according to Leech is

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<sup>160</sup> For Brown and Levinson compare G. Elen, *A Critique of Politeness Theories*, (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2001).

<sup>161</sup> see Leech, p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 9.



concerned only with ‘publicly conveyed meaning’ and cannot make pragmatic claims on what goes on privately in someone’s head.<sup>163</sup> In other words, the issue is what the speaker wants to communicate to the hearer and it is quite open to the speaker to opt out of a pragmatic strategy in order to minimize the effect of an utterance and further disguise his true thoughts.

Further criticism directed especially at Brown and Levinson’s study is the apparent neglect of impoliteness. In an essay examining the long-term usefulness of Brown and Levinson’s model, Kate Gilks notes the fact that non-compliance with politeness strategies is always examined with reference to definitions of politeness rather than being explored as a form behaviour between politeness and impoliteness.<sup>164</sup> In her paper reviewing research on linguistic politeness, Gabriele Kasper proposes adding some kinds of rude behaviour to Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies, like ‘lack of affect control’, ‘strategic rudeness’ and ‘ironic rudeness’.<sup>165</sup> In my view, however, in both Brown and Levinson’s as well as Leech’s strategies, impoliteness is sufficiently accounted for. Brown and Levinson do this by allowing the FTA without redressive action and Leech by allowing for the flouting of the maxims of the Politeness Principle. As the analysis of the plays below will demonstrate, these can provide subtle tools for understanding the ways in which polite as well as less-than-polite meanings can be conveyed.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>164</sup> Kate Gilks, *Is the Brown and Levinson Model of Politeness (1987) (sic) as useful and influential as originally claimed? An assesement of the revised Brown and Levinson (1987) Model*, (University of Nottingham, School of English Studies: Nottingham, 2009) <<http://server2.docfoc.com/uploads/Z2015/12/18/cdTrVG179C/d9668dc23d19c045df306efc0830122e.pdf>> [accessed October 27, 2016].

<sup>165</sup> Gabriela Kasper, ‘Linguistic politeness. Current Research Issues’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14.2 (April 1990), pp. 193-218.

Leech's interpersonal rhetoric and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory have many similarities, with each offering significant contributions to my analysis of communication in the plays. Since there is no integrated theory of pragmatics, my eclectic approach allows me to use key devices from both studies to gain insight into the workings of dramatic discourse, illuminating character interaction as well as social dynamics. Through the interpretation of language within the context of dramatic action and interaction social issues can be identified, not least because in the writer's fictional world the language used by the characters can be characteristic of the time and society in which the works were written. It is particularly Watzlawick's theory that allows for the examination of the social issues that emerge through language use in the plays. The idea that problems were not always the result of deep underlying psychological issues, but instead rose from interactional patterns was not new but bears similarities to R. D. Laing's works.

Watzlawick's study *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, first published in 1967, acknowledges the influence of R.D. Laing's work of the 60's. The then radical view that psychological problems rather than being seen in isolation acquire a different meaning when viewed in the context of ongoing relationships was brought into the mainstream of psychotherapeutic practice.<sup>166</sup> This key idea underpins Watzlawick's theory of communication as described in section 4.3.1 of this investigation. Watzlawick's work complements Leech's and Brown and Levinson's theories, which are more concerned with the linguistic side of pragmatics, by contributing a view on the psychological aspect of communication.

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<sup>166</sup> I refer in this connection to my Introduction where I describe R. D. Laing's influence on Watzlawick's work in more detail.

It is works such as Watzlawick's which allow Stephen C. Levinson to conclude: 'It is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspect of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the function of signs.'<sup>167</sup>

Watzlawick's main concern is the study of communication within family systems and these are highly resistant to change. That makes it difficult to apply Watzlawick's axioms to family relationships, especially as the theory states that the intervention of an outsider could help to recognize the problem when the people concerned are very much trapped in their own language. This does not preclude that Watzlawick advocates the possibility to resort to psychotherapeutic help as can be seen from the various situations he describes in his work.<sup>168</sup> No serious criticism appeared of Watzlawick's study – that has meanwhile been seen as a standard work – until 1977 with Jürgen Ziegler's *Kommunikation als Paradoxer Mythos* (Weinheim, 1977) criticism emerged that undertook a detailed and polemic analysis of Watzlawick's work.<sup>169</sup> Ziegler breaks down Watzlawick's axioms and exposes them as an untenable hypothesis. Based on a selectivity which is unusual for scientific study Zieglers criticizes Watzlawick's basically non-causal, well founded communication theory with causal categories which would lead to the failure of the whole concept. Ziegler concludes that Watzlawick's assertion that behind the appearance of real life there is a formal calculus would imply on the one side the hypostasis of formal logic and on the other represents its ontologization. In principle Ziegler's argument that

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<sup>167</sup> Compare Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, p. 2.

<sup>168</sup> see for example pp. 139-41 and 198-99.

<sup>169</sup> I refer to my footnote 114 where I mention criticism on Watzlawick.

Watzlawick's concept of communication is too rigid and too calculable leaving no space for reflexivity, is worth taking into consideration.

I have, however, found that this represents no hindrance in the study of dramatic language. The axioms set out by Watzlawick and his scientific knowledge on the qualification of communication have proven illuminating and valuable for the analysis of the plays in question.

This brief summary should explain my reasons for drawing widely on different insights into pragmatics to enable me to reach a fuller interpretation of the effect of language in the plays to be analysed. In the following section I will concentrate on the similarities and differences between everyday and literary language that should further clarify the suitability of applying the properties of pragmatic linguistics to the analysis of literary, especially dramatic language.

## **4.5 Literary and Everyday Discourse: A Pragmatic Perspective**

The preceding sections have given a detailed account of how the different approaches to pragmatics explain what takes place when human beings speak to one another and with what consequences. I have also given some indications, by means of examples from the plays to be analysed in this study on the way in which the individual theories work in practice. Before looking at the particular significance of pragmatics for the analysis of drama in section 4.5.1, I will in the following make some general observations on how written language relates to everyday conversation and why explaining written language in terms of its pragmatic condition can contribute to the understanding of literary discourse as well as social reality. In section 4.5.1.2 I will point out the similarities as well as the differences between dramatic and extra-dramatic conversation.

Pragmatic theory is promising for the analysis of dialogue between characters as well as for the interaction between writer and reader. Not only dialogue but also literary works themselves can be seen as performative speech acts.

‘Literature’ – says Terry Eagleton – ‘may appear to be describing the world and sometimes actually does so but its real function is performative: it uses language within certain conventions in order to bring about certain effects in a reader. It achieves something in the saying’.<sup>170</sup> Critics often question the practicability of applying the same analytical concepts to verbal and literary language arguing that it should be obvious that written texts, which are carefully prepared and thought over, represent a different mode of communication than the spontaneous interaction and feedback that takes place in oral conversation. In reply it could be argued that while the mutually adjusting and instantaneous reaction involved in ordinary conversation makes it generally easier for a speaker to calculate whether his communication has been successful or not, the writer will be just as concerned about successfully interacting with his readers as participants in naturally occurring conversations and will resort to similar strategies. While writers have more time to prepare and formulate what they want to express, they are just as aware of the dangers of trying to force their point of view on the reader and will resort just as much to indirectness, hedges or metacommunication as speakers in naturally occurring conversation. Significant for the success of oral as well as written interaction in a great variety of situations is the use of politeness strategies. Writers as well as speakers should be able to estimate what features of language might be offensive and either avoid them or choose to use them if they

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<sup>170</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 118.

are in line with what they want to achieve. The question where a person places herself on the politeness scale becomes according to Roger Sell '[...] a calculated risk, a tightrope walk between too much and too little'<sup>171 172</sup>

As has been explained in connection with Leech's and Brown and Levinson's theories, most conversations are not conducted between equals whose interests are identical but between individuals with divergent interests, thus participants in conversations break some of Grice's maxims to further their own goals and they expect their fellow conversationalists to do the same. Much the same is true for literary reading. Readers and writers have different interests and assumptions but the significance of the CP is reflected in the fact that total non-cooperation is rare, since the reader still expects consistency in some form of cooperation, just as the writer assumes the reader's acceptance of the deviation from one or more of Grice's maxims. Significant for everyday as well as for literary interaction is the exploitation of the maxims in certain contexts in order to mean more than what is actually said, which Grice calls conversational implicature. The theory of implicature seems especially interesting for literary criticism. When a writer writes something that seems to be at first sight irrelevant to what it is the reader has been led to be interested in, he would probably rely upon the reader looking for relevance in the text since readers would assume that everything that is in the literary text is there for some purpose, it has in, other words, some implicature.

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<sup>171</sup> See Roger D. Sell, 'The Politeness of Literary Texts' in R. D. Sell, ed., *Literary Pragmatics* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 217. See also my elaborations in section 4.2 on Brown and Levinson's theory *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*.

<sup>172</sup> Although I have dealt extensively with Leech's (*The Principles of Pragmatics*) and Brown and Levinson's (*Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*) interpretations of Politeness, I would like to mention amongst the substantial literature on the subject Jonathan Culpeper's overview on Politeness : Culpeper, Jonathan, 'Politeness and Impoliteness', in Karin Aichmer and Gisle Anderlin, eds., *Sociopragmatics*, Volume 5 of *Handbooks of Pragmatics*, ed. by Wolfram Bublitz, Andreas H. Jucker and Klaus P. Schneider. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2011) pp.391-436.

What appears to be the violation of a Gricean maxim – as Tatiana Karpenko rightly argues in her paper ‘Pragmatic Aspects of Literary Communication’ – is still relevant to the overall purpose of the author. The fact that deviations from Grice’s maxims are still significant for the writer’s overall message is proof that the reader ‘is never mislead’. In literary, as in naturally occurring communication, Karpenko concludes, non-fulfillment of the maxims is always goal oriented which makes it reasonable to apply similar maxims to literary and everyday language.<sup>173</sup>

Conversational analysis also takes into account the process of deducing or making explicit what is unspoken or – in literary communication – unwritten, where it is left to the interactants to supply their own frame of reference. In literary as in non-literary texts much information can be taken for granted or presupposed because interactants share common or cultural knowledge. By drawing on presupposed common cultural background experience we can infer the appropriate illocutionary force of utterances that superficially appear to flout the CP (for example disregard of the maxim of quality: participants should be as informative as required, is still significant on the level of implicature). Newspaper articles, instruction books and letters will all assume a considerable amount of shared background knowledge. In the construction and interpretation of narratives and plays this kind of inference is also absolutely necessary. Without the taking for granted of facts, details and cultural knowledge, the reading of literary works would certainly become tedious, uninteresting and even impossible.

Part of literary communication is predicated on the basis of the understanding of our own world and informed by the audience/reader’s extra-textual experience.

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<sup>173</sup> See Tatiana Karpenko ‘Pragmatic Aspects of Literary Communication’, Occasional Papers No.3, PALA, The Poetic and Linguistic Association, 1993.

Similarities of communicative experience and psychological and sociological background help writer and reader to follow similar basic rules of interaction when constructing or perceiving a communicative experience. I refer in this connection to Ernest Hess-Lüttich's article 'How does the Writer of a Dramatic Text interact with the Audiences? On the Pragmatics of Literary Communication'. Hess-Lüttich explains how the same type of 'psychological experience' helps people in several different kinds of situation, whether as ordinary participants in a conversation or as audience/reader of a dialogue, to understand the means and rules of practical interaction. Writers of fictional dialogue take into account similar assumptions to represent communicative processes. The writer's imitation of dialogue is, according to Hess-Lüttich, nothing other than the projection of the entire communicative experience of an author. As I understand Hess-Lüttich, similarities of communicative experience and psychological and sociological background would help writer and reader to follow similar basic rules of interaction when constructing or perceiving a communicative process.<sup>174</sup> It is therefore logical that other kinds of experience might produce different kinds of meaning not accepted by the author.

Much communicative information relies on our ability to harness our understanding of the 'real' world, so that we assume certain things based on experience even if they may not be described in the text. It is assumed that events that are potentially significant for the story will be foregrounded. Broadly defined and for the purpose of this research project, foregrounding can be seen as the

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<sup>174</sup> Compare Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich, 'How does the Writer of a Dramatic Text interact with the Audiences?', in *Literary Pragmatics* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 227. Hess-Lüttich quotes G. Ungeheuer who speaks of '[die] Projektion der kommunikativen Gesamterfahrung des Autors'. G. Ungeheuer, 'Gesprächsanalyse an literarischen Texten' in *Sprachsoziologie und Pragmatik in der Literaturwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1980), pp. 43-71.



highlighting of linguistic features for special effects against the background of the rest of the text. Linguistic foregrounding occurs when unexpected usage suddenly forces the listener or reader to take note of the utterance itself rather than continue his automatic concern with its content. Foregrounding is achieved by a variety of means, which can be largely grouped under two main types, deviation and repetition. Deviations are violations of linguistic norms, for example unusual metaphors, metonymies, oxymorons, also figures of speech like hyperboli, litotes or irony that distort the truth by violating the Gricean principles. Repetitions are superimposed on the expectations of normal usage by over frequency and so strike the reader's attention. An extract of Albee's one-act play *The Zoo Story* that opens with the following lines, illustrates this point: 'JERRY: I've been to the zoo. (PETER *doesn't notice*) I said, I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!' (ZSt p. 12). Here unusual and unexpected repetition is significant for the theme of the play which is concerned with human isolation and men being separated not only from each other like animals behind bars but also alienated from their own emotions. References to the zoo and Peter's unwillingness to engage with fellow human beings are significant throughout for the development of the play.<sup>175</sup>

Linguistic devices like repetitive patterns of sound or syntax, alliterations or unusual figures of speech that deviate from their usual meaning and collocation, are not unknown in non-literary language (e.g. advertising or jokes). Certainly literature, particularly poetry, commonly foregrounds language and meaning consciously and creatively. Yet, there are many literary works, especially prose and drama, that do not use remarkably deviant language. Their language is literary

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<sup>175</sup> See Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story*, passim.

not in a sense that differentiates it from ordinary language but only in that it belongs to a work regarded generically as literature. Literary language can be different and yet not different from non-literary language in the sense that it will exhibit certain features that are seen as appropriate in relation to its genre but still recognizable from non-literary contents. For example the choice of names by a dramatic author is never gratuitous and gives rise to associations which carry non-literary meaning. George and Martha in *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* share the names of George Washington and his wife Martha. This reference to America's first couple is open to interpretation.<sup>176</sup> A noticeable difference would be that literary language generally proceeds through syntactically more complete and better-segmented utterances than everyday language, as in everyday conversation the social function predominates over the informative function, while in literary language every utterance is significant and has the function of carrying the action forward. Yet, the fact remains that pragmatics makes available a set of conventions that links writers and readers and relates the text to their own outside world. As will be explained in the following section, drama, where speech is action, is particularly suitable for an analysis based on pragmatic devices. The playwright has no narrative framework to explain and the reader/auditor is immediately confronted with the verbal exchange amongst the characters that brings it nearer to oral conversation.

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<sup>176</sup> Bigsby suggests that in naming the two principal characters after George and Martha Washington, Albee hinted at a concern for the fate of a country 'in which animating ideals had decayed into mere illusions and commitments into rhetorical gestures'. Christopher Bigsby, 'Then and Now', Program to Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* at the 'Almeida Theatre', 11 September 1996.

### 4.5.1 Dramatic Features

And since there is theatre only if all the spectators are united,  
situations must be found which are so general that they are  
common to all. Jean Paul Sartre<sup>177</sup>

In the preceding section it has been explained that pragmatic linguistics can be applied equally to the analysis of everyday and literary discourse. What sets drama apart from other forms of literature and brings it nearer to everyday language is that the speech event is the chief form of interaction. Whatever its stylistic and poetic function, drama is in the first place based on a dialogue that sets in opposition the different personal and social forces of the dramatic world. 'In a play' – says Richard Ohman – 'the action rides on a train of illocutions ... movements of the characters and changes in their relations to one another within the social world of the play appear most clearly in their illocutionary acts.'<sup>178</sup> The social and interpersonal power of language that pragmatics calls 'doing things with words' is dominant in drama. It should therefore be obvious that methods and findings from the investigation of ordinary talk can deepen our understanding of the art form that is dramatic dialogue.

In her study *Twentieth-Century Drama. Dialogue as Ordinary Talk*, Susan Mandala claims that not only has the analysis of drama texts been neglected in comparison to poetry and fiction by critics but that the specific study of drama dialogue is even more rare. Those critics who do engage with drama while taking language into account are, according to Mandala, 'not as persuasive as they could

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<sup>177</sup> 'For a Theater of Situations' in *Jean Paul Sartre on Theatre*. Documents assembled, edited, introduced and annotated by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (London: Quartet Books, 1976), p. 4.

<sup>178</sup> Richard Ohmann, 'Literature as Act', in Seymour Chatman, ed., *Approaches to Poetics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 81-107 (p. 83), as quoted by Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 159.

be' since they tend to be heavily dependent on the identification of lexical items, i.e. interpretation of individual words, phrases or larger utterances. While an investigation into the language of a particular text can certainly include an analysis of lexical terms it could, according to Mandala, go much further in the application of pragmatic linguistic categories by showing that a character is not only constructed in a certain way but also how he is so constructed through the dialogue in the text.<sup>179</sup>

While playwrights, as well as readers/auditors, are aware of certain conventions that are inherent in plays, theatrical texts are too rich and fluid to allow a precise and extensive formulation to be produced of all the concepts that determine their encoding and decoding. As this research concerns itself with interaction in Edward Albee's and Martin Walser's plays and how theatrical speech reveals conflictive situations that contribute to the understanding of human interaction, I will attempt to outline only those main dramatic features that can be elucidated by pragmatics and that are useful for my research.

If, as I suggested in the previous section, the understanding of a literary work depends largely on the assumption that the writer and reader share similar cultural and linguistic experiences, such a premise is all the more significant for theatrical

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<sup>179</sup> Susan Mandala, *Twentieth-Century Drama Dialogue as Ordinary Talk. Speaking Between the Lines*. Mandala is critical of a number of approaches, one of which is that of Martin Esslin, the undisputed expert in Pinter criticism who sees Pinter as a master of ordinary talk and describes Mike's decorating suggestions in *The Caretaker* – 'you could have an off-white pile linen rug, a table...in aromosia teak veneer [...]' as 'genuine poetry' that 'transmits the jargon of contemporary brand names into a dreamlike world of wish fulfillment'. Compare M. Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), p. 281, as quoted by S. Mandala, p. 5. While these interpretations may, on the one hand, seem appropriate in the light of the images, they are, on the other, according to Mandala, based on intuitions and assumptions that do not provide information about the role of dialogue and do little to advance an understanding of Pinter's exploitation of conversational language (compare S. Mandala, p. 5). By applying Gricean perspectives as well as categories from Brown and Levinson's and Leech's works, Mandala analyses a number of plays, providing a clear and comprehensive understanding of the interaction between the characters as well as of what is said on the author/reader level. Compare S. Mandala, pp. 37-113. See also Harald Pinter, *The Caretaker* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 91.

language because, unlike prose narratives, the reader is confronted with immediate action. Different to other worlds that are only conceived after they have been fully specified or at least partially described, as in prose fiction, the dramatic world is assumed by the spectator/reader to be in existence before it has been specified. ‘The dramatic world’ – states Umberto Eco – ‘picks up a pre-existing world of properties (and therefore individuals) from the real world, that is from the world to which the spectator is invited to refer to as the world of reference.’<sup>180</sup>

Unless otherwise indicated, the reader/spectator expects the represented world to assume the cultural rules operative in his own world, which means that he ‘takes for granted a mutual background [...] with all its logical truth’.<sup>181</sup> It would be difficult to refer to persons or objects if the reader/hearer could not identify or attribute to them properties which are part of his own, as well as the writer’s, social and psychological experience. Alongside these background assumptions it is the task of the author to provide the reader/interlocutor with the necessary information to make it possible to relate the characters to the context that constitutes their dramatic world.

What allows the playwright to work on the assumption of a hypothetically previously existing world is the use of *deictic elements*. Deixis as it is currently defined, is arguably the most significant feature – statistically and functionally – that sets drama apart from narrated discourse, helping to create the world of the play by contextualizing speech behaviour and situating it in the ‘here’ and ‘now’. Deixis creates a communicative situation for dramatic discourse by defining the

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<sup>180</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Possible Worlds and Text Pragmatics: Un drame bien parisien’, *Versus*, 19-20, pp. 5-72, as quoted by Keir Elam, p. 104.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

protagonist ('I'), the addressee ('you') and the context ('here'). Elam defines the place of deixis in drama as 'the primary means whereby language gears itself to the speaker and receiver (through the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you') and to the time and place of the action (through the adverbs 'here' and 'now', etc.).'<sup>182</sup>

The opening scene of Albee's play *A Delicate Balance* should provide an example for the use of deixis in the form of personal pronouns to help create the immediacy of a dramatic situation and to indicate the protagonists' – Tobias's and Agnes's – respective roles within the structure of the drama. The play opens with Agnes's utterance (my italics) 'What *I* find most astonishing', showing a constant repetition of personal pronouns of which only a few examples are recorded in the following: '*I* might', '*I* am' '*I* suspect', '*I* am about to' or '*you* might', 'why on earth do *you* want anisette?'. The development of the interaction takes a more threatening course which in turn is also emphasized through the use of personal pronouns: 'Are *you* going to throw something at *me*?' or '*I* shall will you to apologize' (see *DB* pp. 7-9), pointing to a dramatic situation that will be revealed to the reader/auditor during the further action of the play. Gestures also act as deictic markers that help provide the kind of contextualization to allow them an active and dialogic function rather than a descriptive role, as the following stage instructions show: 'TOBIAS. [...] (*Putters at the bottle.*), (*Pouring*)' (*DB* pp. 7-8) or 'TOBIAS (*Cutting a cigar*), (*Gets matches from the table*), (*shrugs, lights his cigar*)' (*DB* pp. 10 -11). Deictic pointers like these which acquire specific value only if they are at once related to the corresponding objects, require the reader/auditor to assume that they form part of a pre-existing and established

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<sup>182</sup> Keir Elam, pp. 26-27. According to Elam deixis is etymologically a gestural concept, i. e. 'pointing' which was adapted by Greek grammarians to the classification of verbal indices (ibid., p. 72).

pattern of behaviour and interaction between the characters which during the development of the play is shown to be questioned and even jeopardized.

By 'actualizing' the dramatic world deixis plays a significant role but the communicative event that takes place between the participants is a crucial part of drama in another sense. 'The dialogue exchange' – states Elam – 'does not merely refer deictically to the dramatic action but directly constitutes it.'<sup>183</sup> The dialogue is in its own right the chief form of interaction in drama and the interaction will be constructed in such a way as to maintain the interest of the auditor/reader. In the following the attempt will be made to describe some of the strategies that contribute to maintain the tension and the interest of dramatic action. The conventions of naturally occurring language are heightened not only due to the degree of textual control to which dramatic language is subject but also to maintain the interest of the reader/spectator. As has been mentioned, the dramatic interaction is mainly carried forward by a sequence of illocutions. These are mostly a succession of conflicting illocutions which present a range of different and often opposing possibilities that cause the reader/spectator to question how they are motivated and to speculate on their outcome. Within the development of the play the playwright will resort to a number of strategies that can be designed as much to outwit as to cooperate with the reader. An example from Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* will illustrate the former: the protagonists George and Martha propose jointly a world that includes the existence of a son who seems to be a point of reference in their lives. Although they cause some confusion by constantly contradicting each other when describing the properties of the son, the other two *dramatis personae*, George and

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

Martha's guests, as well as the reader/spectator are lead to believe in his existence. The revelation that the son is an invention shows the abandonment of this belief by all concerned. In this situation the author resorts to a strategy whereby the reader/spectator's belief world coincides with that of the guests and also with the fantasy world of Martha and George.

Whereas the above situation shows a degree of overlap between the dramatic and the spectator/reader world, an example from Walser's *Die Zimmerschlacht* indicates how the author often resorts to a strategy where he seeks reader/auditor cooperation by sharing his view on the characters' faulty attitudes. Here the author allows the reader/spectator to gain insight into the production of speech acts which the author knows to be defective but are considered successful by the characters. As the analysis in section five will show, Felix resorts to all sorts of deceiving devices which do not reflect his real motivation to convince Trude that they should stay away from Benno's party and which Trude, albeit reluctantly at times, seems to accept at least during the first half of the play. The reader/spectator on the other hand is able to follow Felix's strategies of concealment which he will interpret on a higher level of communication with the author.

The preceding section has explained that essential for the understanding of writer/reader communication is the assumption that not everything meant by the characters is explicitly said. In drama as in ordinary speech, participants are engaged in a form of interaction which means that they share more or less similar basic principles which they use with the intention of achieving an effective and coherent exchange. Grice formulates this general requirement as a global conversational rule which he names the CP. The CP and its maxims have been



dealt with in detail in the theoretical part of this thesis and were taken up in the previous section. The observance of the maxims is by no means always applicable as it is often the breaking of the rules that is of interest. In order to mean more than they say, speakers may produce conversational implicatures by exploiting one or more of the Gricean maxims. They are understood by the listener based on the assumption that the speaker is continuing to cooperate but since the utterances are apparently defective, that is the speaker breaks one or more of the Gricean maxims, he must mean more than he says. For the interpretation of a play the difference between sentence meaning and utterance, the verbal content and the meaning behind it, is of crucial concern to the decoding of a dramatic work.<sup>184</sup> If as quoted above ‘the action rides on a train of illocutions’ then we should add that these are often concealed and require an interpretation. The significance of Grice’s implicature has been amply documented in the theoretical sections and will be looked at again in the analysis of the plays and will therefore not be illustrated with examples in this section.

It should be pointed out that the reader of dramatic texts does not construct the dramatic world in precisely the same way as the spectator of a theatrical performance. A spectator is often confronted with spontaneous and instinctive movements of the actors that are not specified in the text but contribute to the spectator’s interpretation of the play. A reader on the other hand, is able to study the text in a more leisurely and concentrated manner which will more likely

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<sup>184</sup> The assumption that breaking the Gricean maxims implies that cooperation is still maintained on the author/reader level has been explained in the previous section (see point 4). A meaningful example would be the Theatre of the Absurd where it could be said that by transgressing *all* the maxims of the Cooperative Principle cooperation is still maintained on the author/reader level. By violating the expectations of ‘normal’ interaction the author invites the reader to explore the extent to which their operation is necessary.

enable him to make explicit the kinds of rule that govern its linguistic dramatic structures.

#### **4.5.1.2 Dramatic and Extra-Dramatic Conversation**

What then from the point of view of interpersonal communication are the differences, if any, between naturally occurring and dramatic interaction? In the following I will try to point out the extent to which some of the features which, while they form part of both, can nevertheless vary according to context.

Whereas naturally occurring conversation takes place in a more or less coherently constructed form, its textual constraints are far looser than those governing dramatic dialogue. In everyday exchange the social function, that is, the phatic signals which serve largely to establish or maintain contact and provide feedback to the speaker, are usually predominant over the informational function. In drama on the other hand, the informational role is predominant, every utterance is in some way significant and carries the action forward. This has to do with the ‘composed’ quality of drama and with the requirements to make dramatic works comprehensible and meaningful within the textual limits imposed. Accordingly, in everyday conversations digressions, redundancies, *non sequiturs* or sudden changes of topics are often permitted without detriment to the overall purpose of the conversation. In drama every utterance counts, everything said is significant and carries the dramatic action forward in some way. Concepts associated with everyday language are often heightened and foregrounded in such a way that, by giving them unusual prominence in the structure of the play, they become instrumental to its meaning by showing awareness of actual social behaviour.

While the significance of foregrounding devices for literary language has been amply discussed under section 4.5, it should nevertheless be noted that

foregrounding features are as much part of non-literary as of literary language: special uses of language found in non-literary language include the use of metaphor, irony, litotes hyperboli. These occur in daily discourse just as they do in dramatic work and can also be found in jokes, football chants and slogans, newspaper headlines and advertisements that are often more florid in their language use than drama.

The above explanations should have made clear that dramatic language itself has no inherent properties or qualities that might distinguish it from other forms of discourse and that its use is defined by the context in which the language is placed. Modern drama in particular reflects and comments on the real world and, as K. Elam rightly affirms, it does not simply ‘model or reflect an existing world’ but is an essential contribution to the understanding of our own world.<sup>185</sup>

I will now turn to the plays themselves in order to demonstrate that an examination based on the devices of naturally occurring language should contribute to our understanding of dramatic speech as well as the problems of naturally occurring conversation.

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<sup>185</sup> K. Elam, p. 133.

## 5 Analysis of the Plays

### 5.1 Die Zimmerschlacht

#### 5.1.1 Walser's Dramatic Conception

Walser's one act play written in 1962/63 was only performed in 1967, while *Eiche und Angora* and *Überlebensgroß Herr Krott*, were written and staged in 1962 and 1964 respectively.<sup>186</sup> The reason for not releasing *Die Zimmerschlacht* at the time of writing was, as Walser admitted in an interview with Helmut Karasek for *Theater Heute*, that both of the other plays by contrast were openly political and that when writing *Die Zimmerschlacht* he was still holding on to his conviction that theatre should be imminently political, something which could only be achieved through '[...] Parabeln nach dem Vorbild Brechts, mit Figuren aus dem Parabel-Stoff, aus dem auch die Brecht Figuren sind'.<sup>187</sup>

If, at the time of writing, Walser thought of *Die Zimmerschlacht* as being too private to show on the stage, he later reached a different conclusion: Walser now felt that in future he did not want to deal with political themes directly as 'Exekutor einer öffentlichen Problematik' but through his own experience. In his own words he wanted to base his plays mainly on his own 'Bewußtseinsinhalte' and work with 'ganz und gar eigene Bewußtseinsschwierigkeiten', an approach

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<sup>186</sup> For a detailed account of Walser's dramatic development and the influence of political circumstances on his work during this period, see Anthony E. Wayne, *Martin Walser. The Development as Dramatist*.

<sup>187</sup> See Helmut Karasek, 'Abschied von der Politik? Helmut Karasek unterhält sich mit Martin Walser über dessen neues Stück "Die Zimmerschlacht"', *Theater Heute* (1967), 6-10. I refer in this connection to my Introduction where I noted that, according to J. Magenau's biography, Walser held back his play *Die Zimmerschlacht* because of the similarity to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* that was being shown at the time (1963) to great acclaim. *Die Zimmerschlacht* had its premiere only in 1967.

which he had long since adopted in his novels.<sup>188</sup> Walser was now determined to give his work an increasing sense of realism which he expected to achieve by looking at the psychology of the individual and at the same time how his or her actions and reactions are shaped by social and economic conditions.

*Die Zimmerschlacht* deals with individual consciousness and the interdependence of private feelings and social conventions, bridging the gap between Walser's earlier dramatic work and his novels. The play is a precursor of the more personal 'Bewußtseinstheater' described in his essay *Ein weiterer Tagtraum vom Theater* and of which *Ein fliehendes Pferd* can be considered an example.<sup>189</sup>

Although the dialogue in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* does not contain the farcical elements of *Die Zimmerschlacht*, the latter shows nevertheless a concentration of themes and techniques which were again taken up in *Ein fliehendes Pferd*. The intrusion of an outsider, here in the form of a young woman, that will eventually lead to the exposure of an incarcerated bourgeois marriage is part of both plays. Both plays focus on private relationships but also point out the social mechanisms that influence behaviour within a relationship. Similarly, Albee's play *A Delicate Balance*, shows how the unexpected intrusion of others – here a middle-aged couple – brings to light the emptiness and lack of solidarity within and outside of the family circle.

The following synopsis of *Die Zimmerschlacht* will give an overall picture of the action to be analysed. Felix Fürst a geography teacher at a local grammar school and his wife Trude have been invited to a party given by their recently

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Compare Martin Walser, 'Ein weiterer Tagtraum vom Theater', in *Heimatkunde, Aufsätze und Reden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968).

divorced friend Benno in honour of his beautiful twenty-four year old wife. Felix, jealous of Benno on the one hand and on the other afraid that the presence of the newcomer will expose his own inabilities and failures, seeks to torpedo the party by trying to organize a boycott with the other invited couples. Forced by Felix's manipulations to spend the evening at home alone, the couple's ability to draw on each other's emotional and social resources gradually collapses giving way to discord and instability. They finally realize their own interdependence on the one hand and on the other their dependence on the wider macrocosm of society. They decide to go to the party at which the other guests have long since arrived.

The following additional information on the history of the play is also relevant here. The play had been broadcast in 1965 by *Hessischer Rundfunk* under the title *Erdkunde* and came to the attention of the director Fritz Kortner who wanted to produce it on the stage and commissioned a second act. Most critics agree that the early productions were marred by the inclusion of this act.<sup>190</sup> In the first half the problems of married life, the observed rituals and the illusions under which the characters live are exposed and destroyed. The dialogues and the monologues are analytical and self-analytical and seem to grow organically out of the preceding scenes. The second act does not seem dramatically legitimate since it presents Felix – who in the first act appears as a character capable of self analysis – as a ridiculous sixty-three-year old pursuing and trying to blackmail an eighteen-year old female student and Trude – after an initial attack of nausea – accepting his aberration. The behaviour of both personae bears no relation to the

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<sup>190</sup> To illustrate this point I quote Hilde Haider-Pregler: 'Dieser zweite Akt konnte sich auf den Bühnen nicht allgemein durchsetzen. Seit der erfolgreichen Inszenierung Leonard Streckels am Berliner Renaissance-Theater (Berlin 8. Februar 1968) wurde der ursprünglichen (einaktigen) Fassung den Vorzug gegeben'. *Der Schauspielführer, Band IX. Das Schauspiel der Gegenwart von 1966 bis 1970*, ed. Margret Dietrich and Edith Markte (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1972), pp. 357-359.

first act since Trude's speech also ceases to be analytical and becomes semi-anecdotal when she reminds Felix of his previous unsuccessful intrigues. The first act encourages reflection whilst the second produces only amusement. It is proof of Walser's capacity for self-criticism that it is excluded from the subsequent editions of his plays. The original play is a real example of Walser's great linguistic skill and, as noted by Anthony Waine, it was at the time 'arguably, Walser's finest piece of comic-realistic theatre'.<sup>191</sup> The following analysis focuses exclusively on the first act.

Even more than *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, the play presents a minimum of dramatic action in the sense of an unfolding story, as it basically revolves around the question as to whether Felix and his wife should or should not go to Benno's party. Since in Walser's plays, as in Albee's, the dialogue takes precedence over the action, it seems obvious that utterances should not be seen as simply providing objective information but should be looked at from the point of view of the underlying message that defines the relationship to the partner.

A detailed analysis of the play based mainly on the insights of pragmatic analysis should provide an analytical framework that moves away from the temptation to retell the plot by looking into the dialogue and transcending the surface structure of the text. The pragmatic analysis will also enable readers/auditors to piece together Trude's and Felix's relationship. Key information is conveyed off-record first and only made explicit as the play develops.

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<sup>191</sup> Anthony E. Waine, *Martin Walser: The Development as Dramatist*, p. 245. *Ein fliehendes Pferd* was not discussed in his book since the novella was only published in 1978 and dramatised in 1985.

### 5.1.2 The Structure of the Play

The play develops dialectically out of the collision of artificial forms of communication that serve to conceal real feelings but allow for the build up of emotions which eventually escalate to forms of aggressiveness that lead to a confrontation with reality. The focus is on Felix and Trude who are the only visible interactants but the structure is not limited to the cast present alone, it also involves and invokes other characters who influence the action.

As indicated above, the interaction centres on a middle-aged couple whose apparently harmonious existence is disturbed by the arrival of a newcomer to their circle of friends. Felix especially fears that the presence of his friend Benno's young wife will lead to the exposure of his own failure to achieve a satisfying social, economic and erotic existence and is afraid to face the artificiality and emptiness of his own marriage. How the interaction evolves, leading to the final realization of the impossibility of maintaining the appearance of a harmonious existence, will be demonstrated here.

For the purpose of this study it is useful to look at the interaction in different stages. The first stage is marked by its farcical tone and shows Felix's all too obvious attempts at hiding his real motive for ruining Benno's party from Trude. Felix justifies his intrigue against Benno by anticipating how Benno will behave towards him. He assumes that Benno will verbally abuse him, exploiting his social role to enhance his own persona in front of his new wife.

The couple agree to stay at home and the second stage involves them thinking up a plethora of erotic roles and games to show their ability to rely on their own resources and their independence from Benno. The comedy ceases and the acting out of roles is terminated by Felix's refusal to continue playing the part of a strong



and powerful male and Trude's frustration at Felix's sexual and social inadequacy. This leads to a breakdown of artificial forms of communication giving way to aggressive accusations which will turn into starkly realistic solo speeches.

In the final stage they make a joint decision to come to terms with reality: by going to the party they admit their dependence on the wider macrocosm of society, a fact they try to redress by reassuring each other that they are making a conscious and free decision.

### 5.1.3 Felix's Concealment Strategies

The dialogue in the first and the second stages, as instigated by Felix, is so obviously dependent on lies and deceptions, that it makes the reader/viewer suspicious and appeals to his/her capacity to read between the lines and search for an underlying truth. Here the discourse level between the playwright and the reader/auditor, what Short describes as the 'embedded nature of discourse in drama', is significant for the understanding of the play. As Short explains, in ordinary communication an addresser sends a message to an addressee. While drama shares this structure, it includes another level of discourse: as characters speak to each other, the playwright is speaking to the audience and implicatures generated between the playwright and the audience may not be generated between the characters.<sup>192</sup> As Felix and Trude speak to each other the playwright implies a second meaning to the audience/reader and engages his or her ability to question Felix's behaviour. Felix's strategies become significant in this context and

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<sup>192</sup> Compare M. Short, 'Discourse Analysis and the Analysis of Drama', in R. Carter and P. Simpson, eds., *Language, Discourse and Literature*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 139-68, as quoted by Susan Mandala, pp. 85-86.

relevant when they are seen in the light of Grice's Cooperative Principle and its maxims and his account of how implicatures are to be understood. Grice reasoned that the starting assumption in communication is that interactants will behave cooperatively, that is, they are aware that contributions are designed to be informative (the maxim of quantity), relevant (the maxim of relation), truthful (the maxim of quality) and clear (the maxim of manner). As has been explained, it is precisely because of these expectations that uninformative, vague, irrelevant and false utterances have meaning. Felix's deliberate failure to observe the various maxims are designed to mislead Trude who does not seem to notice his off record strategies: by being vague and ambiguous, he violates the maxim of manner in such a way that his communications remain undefined. The dialogue at this point offers enough initial information for the audience to suspect that something is up but not enough to work out what is in Felix's mind.

The following stage instructions on which the play opens, also provide a starting point to illustrate the above reflections:

*Felix nimmt den Hörer ab und wählt eine fünfstellige Nummer. Er spricht halblaut, schaut während des Sprechens zur Tür, durch die Trude verschwunden ist. Offensichtlich soll sie nicht hören was er sagt. (ZS p. 117)*<sup>193</sup>

Felix's utterances are aimed at urging Neumerkel, together with his other colleagues, to stay away from Benno's party. At Trude's appearance – '*Trude von links. Sie bringt ein frisches Hemd*' (ZS p. 17) – he switches from a highly conspiratorial tone to a noncommittal remark: '*Also Herr Kollege, es wird sicher ein denkwürdiger Abend für uns alle. Danke. Bitte, das gleiche für die Ihre*'. To

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<sup>193</sup> Quotations from the text are from 'Die Zimmerschlacht' in *Martin Walser Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987), pp. 117-154. Henceforth abbreviated to ZS and referred to parenthetically in the text with the page number.

Trude's enquiry – 'Wer war das?' –, Felix's reply – 'Ach nur Neumerkel' (ZS p. 17) – fails to observe the maxim of quantity (give the right amount of information). The wording of his preceding conversation with Neumerkel coupled with the intonational clues given in the stage instructions prompts the reader/audience to question the implications of Felix's behaviour. As Felix is not prepared to disclose what is really behind his actions he prefers to continue resorting to deceptions and lies. When Trude, unaware of his real intention, enquires if Neumerkel is about to leave for the party – 'Brecken die schon auf? (ZS p. 117) – Felix flouts the maxim of relation by passing over her remark and referring instead to the shirt Trude is bringing in for him: 'Du trägst das Hemd wie einen Täufling, Trude' (ZS p. 117). Much of the dialogue in this first part shows Felix's deliberate failure to observe the various maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle. He breaks the maxim of quality, for instance, by pretending to search for the tie he tried to hide and a piece of which is sticking out from the pocket of his trousers:

TRUDE Felix, du Redner. Da, was ist denn das? *Zieht ihm die Krawatte, die ein Stück aus der Tasche hängt, heraus.* (ZS p. 118)

Felix's obvious violation of the Gricean maxims indicates an implicature on the writer/reader level. The cooperative principle between writer and reader is maintained and is relevant to the overall purpose of the author. With this purpose in mind much of the dialogue in this first part the author raises the audience's suspicion at Felix's obviously deceptive strategies, he will also question why Trude seems to be taking them in her stride, only gently chiding him and ignoring

the hints which signal at least to the reader/auditor Felix's intention to stay away from the party.

When Felix is no longer able to sustain the pretence that he has mislaid his clothes he changes strategies, trying to seduce Trude with the promise of an erotic evening:

Ach, Trude. *Springt auf. Versucht wieder den jungen Ehemann zu spielen; leicht und erregt:* Warum verlassen wir dieses Zimmer? Unsere selige Wohnung, Trude! Haben wir nicht geschnauft wie verrückt vor Aufregung, bis wir endlich sowas hatten, was man radikal zuschließen kann. [...] Du und ich. [...]. (ZS p. 118)

The reader is not expected to draw conclusions at this point, but his or her search for clarity and a reasonable interpretation suggests that Felix's sudden change of strategy violates the maxim of relation (be relevant) for the purpose of misleading Trude. She herself is not prepared to give in to Felix's sudden wish to stay at home and tries to avert his verbal expressions and accompanying gestures which appear as violations of the maxim of quality. Words and gestures like '*gibt sich gedrängt, zärtlich*. Trude, fühl meinen Puls. Mein Herz wenn du kannst. Darf man sowas verschieben' (ZS p. 119), sound exaggerated and hyperbolic since Felix's choice of words is stronger than warranted in the context. The urgency of his request is also emphasized by the fact that the utterance 'Darf man sowas verschieben' has the lexical format of a question but is formulated as an assertion. While Felix continues to resort to erotic formulations, Trude's reluctance to give in to his proposition forces him to voice his intention not to go to Benno's party openly: 'Und wenn wir überhaupt nicht kommen' (ZS p. 119). Felix resorts to on record strategies to express the urgent desire to convince Trude not to go. According to Brown and Levinson an actor goes on record when the desire to be

urgent is greater than the desire to maintain the hearer's face. Felix's emotional outburst on the one hand expresses resentment against Benno and on the other compels Trude to fall into line with his wants by anticipating what Benno's reaction to their presence at the party would be. In this part of the play Felix enacts how he imagines Benno will make him, and also Trude, the target of his subtle, but unmistakable criticism, making them into the laughing stock of the others present. Talk can be openly reenacted, mimicked and embedded into the current interaction and someone else's words can be repeated or imagined, often in a mocking accent. The interlocutor is dealing with two personae, and has to differentiate between the one present and the embedded character who is being talked about. The speaker uses hedges and qualifiers to fit a second person's utterances into his own statements. Felix feigns the condescending tone he assumes Benno will adopt when he realizes that they have not arrived at the party: 'Wo bleibt den der Felix? Und Trude? Ja, sowas. Die sind doch zuverlässig wie die Quarzuhr. *Scharf*. Hat er gesagt, Trude, wörtlich' (ZS p. 120). The last phrase is to reassure Trude that his hypothetical conversation is based on real wordings uttered by Benno on previous occasions.<sup>194</sup>

Trude's objection 'Das ist doch nichts Schlimmes?' (ZS p. 120) is invalidated with a perfunctory remark – 'Sein Ton. Du mußt seinen Ton mithören' (ZS p. 120) – and a further attempt at mitigating his accusations is strongly repudiated. The following passage illustrates this.

TRUDE Felix! Was ist passiert zwischen Euch? Er war Doch wirklich dein Freund.

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I am here referring to E. Goffman's use of the term 'embedding'. Compare E. Goffman *Interaction Ritual, Essays on Face to Face Behaviour*.

FELIX Mein Freund! Und wenn wir hingehen und er stellt mich seiner Dingsda, dieser Neuerwerbung vor. Ich hör ihn schon, wie er sagt: darf ich bekannt machen das ist unser Felix, Herr Doktor Felix Fürst, Erdkunde und Geschichte, aber Geschichte will er abstoßen, unser Felix, ist so ne fixe Idee von ihm, Erdkunde soll Hauptfach werden, ach bitte, Felix, fang erst in einer halben Stunde davon an, meine junge Frau muß sich zuerst an alles gewöhnen. Und wenn er das gesagt hat kassiert er Euer Grinsen und du grinst mit, weil du für diesen Kampf zu naiv bist, du spürst nicht die Beleidigung. [...]  
(ZS pp. 120-121)

The audience will look for an explanation that fits into Felix's assumptions and accusations and is somehow left wondering if they are based on reality or if the obvious disregard of the principles of politeness with reference to Benno and also to Trude implies a hidden motivation. Whether what Felix foresees as Benno's behaviour is based on real previous experiences and therefore justifiable or motivated by his own view of the situation is not clear at this point and pragmatically irresolvable. What can be observed is that Felix's attitude shows the kind of pattern that is typical of a self-fulfilling prophecy where the person concerned sees himself only as reacting to but not as provoking the opponent's attitude. In the following passage Felix continues to illustrate what he assumes will be Benno's behaviour:

FELIX Ich geh da nicht mehr hin, Trude. Begreifst du das. Nie mehr. Unser guter Felix! Diese...diese seidenen Sätze, die er mir um den Hals wirft, daß du erst ganz zuletzt merkst, wenn du schon keine Luft mehr kriegst, es war wieder eine Schlinge. Da nimmt er sie aber schon wieder zurück und sagt allen Zuhörern: da schaut, ich bring ihn ja gar nicht um, ich laß ihn doch leben, unseren guten Felix. Trude, ich brauch dich jetzt. (ZS p. 121)

This last phrase, 'Trude, ich brauch dich jetzt', expresses Felix's emotional state and is an appeal to Trude for understanding and support. Trude, on the other hand,

is impervious to Felix's plea and wants to see it as the promise of an erotic evening:

TRUDE *genießend*: Mhmmm. Das duftet. Felix. Das duftet nach Gelegenheit. Mein Felix braucht mich. Das müßte man ausnützen. Schließlich mußt du mir heute was bieten wenn du verlangst, daß wir hierbleiben, Felix! (ZS p. 121)

Watzlawick speaks of a discrepancy in the punctuation of sequences of events that occurs when participants have different views of reality. Unresolved discrepancies in the punctuation of communicational sequences can lead to interactional impasses in which eventually mutual charges of badness are proffered. These discrepancies may go on indefinitely unless the partners speak about their communication, that is, they begin to metacommunicate. At this point Felix and Trude are reluctant to admit to each other and to themselves the real cause of their misunderstanding. Only when their disagreement surfaces to the point that it becomes intolerable will they try to face the real reasons for their misunderstandings.

Felix's utterance clearly shows that his state of mind is far removed from Trude's expectations:

FELIX dachte an etwas anderes: Mengel sagt, dem hat er sie natürlich gleich vorstellen müssen, der sagt, diese Neue sei eine ganz gut aussehende, eine enorm gut aussehende Person. Du weißt ja wie Mengel sich ausdrückt. Und damit will Benno natürlich triumphieren über uns. Darauf hat er's abgesehen. (ZS p. 121)

Readers/audiences do not have to wait long to confirm the suspicion that Felix's source of concern is Benno's young wife, so much so that he takes no notice of Trude's suggestion of an erotic evening, implying to the reader that the thought of

the young woman undermines his feelings for her. Trude on her part tries to gloss over Felix's remark by making concessions to Benno: 'Ach Gott, er ist Architekt, ich weiß nicht, was du da verlangen willst, Felix. Er ist nun mal aufs Äußerliche' (ZS p. 121). This only ignites a new flow of words from Felix to express his contempt for Benno and his young wife: 'Aber mich soll er in Ruhe lassen [...] soll er dieses Ding, das enorme Weibsbild, soll er doch machen mit ihr was er will! Aber mich soll er verschonen. Und dich auch. [...]' (ZS pp. 121-122). Felix's abusive language appears more and more disproportionate and out of place to what is perceived as a domestic situation: depersonalizing the subject – 'dieses Ding' and 'das enorme Weibsbild' – implies the wish to denigrate Benno's new wife by treating her as a non-person. This utterance contrasts with Felix's previous remark where he speaks of her as 'eine enorm gut aussehende Person'. Watzlawick coined the term 'schizophrenese' to indicate a paradoxical situation where the speaker leaves it up to the listener to take his choice from a number of possible meanings which are not only different from but may even be incompatible with each other. Behind Felix's strong condemnation of Benno, his young wife and his admiration for the latter's physical attributes the reader sees frustration and envy at Benno's ability to exchange a prescribed routine for an exciting new life style, to the point that he seeks the means to punish Benno for his boldness and also to avoid being confronted with his own failure to live up to Benno and his new acquisition.

In his attempt to deconstruct Trude's reservations, Felix's attacks on Benno seem more and more unreasonable and far fetched before she finally becomes aware of his real motivation that is also damaging to her own self-esteem. As the



following passage and its subsequent analysis indicates, she feels entitled to express her feelings through a number of strategies that are bound to offend:

TRUDE Wie ich mit dir dran bin. Das begreife ich. Ganz hübsch was da herauskommt, wenn du mal so ein bisschen aus dir herausgehst. *Sie ist aufgestanden und weggegangen, er folgt ihr.* Rühr mich nicht an. Wirklich ganz hübsch. Du hast dich nämlich ganz schön verplappert.[...]Warum gehen wir nicht hin und versauen ihm seinen Triumph an Ort und Stelle. Ich sag dir warum! Weil du eine ganz kleine Nummer bist. Du weißt schon bevor du dieses Weibsbild gesehen hast, daß du's nicht aushälst, daß dir vor Neid daß Maul abstirbt und du gelb und grün wirst im Gesicht. Das heißt also ich bin überhaupt nichts. Diese Person, die Enorme, die schlägt mich aus dem Feld, bevor sie überhaupt auf der Bildfläche erscheint. Das heißt es doch! (ZS p. 123)

The ironic illocutions 'ganz hübsch' and 'wirklich ganz hübsch' breach the quality principle. What Trude says is polite but clearly not true, what she really means is impolite to Felix but true. Further flouting of the maxim of quality is shown through the use of metaphors that bear offensive connotations as in 'eine ganz kleine Nummer' and 'daß dir vor Neid das Maul abstirbt and du gelb und grün wirst im Gesicht' or the depersonalization 'diese Person'. The utterance 'Rühr mich nicht an' is an imperative that flouts the Politeness Principle since it decreases the degree of optionality for the hearer and is offensive to Felix.

Leech's extension of Grice's Cooperative Principle and its maxims is of particular relevance in this play. Leech proposed that interaction in talk should also be considered in relation to some additional maxims that are more on the affective side, like tact, generosity and sympathy. These maxims state that speakers will expect others to observe them unless they have good reason not to. The following passage is an example how both Felix and Trude flout the tact maxim:

TRUDE Und daß du's weiß, ich geh hin.  
 FELIX Und machst dich lächerlich vor dieser Person.  
 TRUDE Die halt ich aus.  
 FELIX Mangel sagt, sie sei vierundzwanzig.  
 TRUDE Na und?  
 FELIX Das wollte ich dir ersparen. [...]  
 TRUDE Die möcht ich erst einmal sehen. Reden möcht ich mit der. Darum geh ich hin.  
 FELIX Und blamierst dich und mich.  
 TRUDE Du blamierst dich. Jetzt schon. Vor mir. Hat die Neue noch nicht gesehen und hat schon weiche Knie. Flattert vor Angst. Das sollte ich Benno erzählen, wie du hier herumzitterst. (ZS pp. 123-24)

Felix's implication that Trude will be undermined by the presence of the younger woman, that youth will inevitably triumph over age and Trude's equally offensive reaction, suggest that they are heading for a symmetrical escalation. Benno's phone call cuts short the confrontation and gives Felix a new opportunity to follow the intrigue against him which, as the stage directions make clear, he has carefully anticipated and worked out:

[...] Ach, Benno *Er spricht überlegen, man merkt, was er jetzt sagt, hat er lange vorher bedacht.* Du wartest! Das kann ich mir vorstellen. Das hoffe ich sogar, daß du wartest. Es wäre doch nicht sehr liebenswürdig, wenn du dir Gäste einlädst und dann würdest du nicht einmal warten auf sie. [...] aach, ach nein, hörst du Trude, wir können noch die ersten sein Trude jetzt aber vorwärts. [...] Er legt auf. (ZS p. 124)

Felix's earlier failures to observe the maxims of quality, relation and manner offered enough evidence to make the reader/audience doubt the sincerity of his words. The contents of Felix's statement appear ironic, as his words are far removed from what he really means. His tone also conveys a certain superiority and distance that denies the involvement and obsession that he has clearly expressed in the preceding interaction with Trude. Felix is also lying as he has no

intention of going to the party at this point. Lies are similar to irony as they both violate the maxim of quality, ‘sentences used in both are untrue’<sup>195</sup> and both convey the impression that Felix’s deceiving strategies are aimed at finally humiliating Benno. While the reader doubts the sincerity of Felix’s behaviour it is not clear why Trude takes his utterances literally:

TRUDE *rafft Tasche und Stola*. Dann aber schnell, Felix. Wenn wir vor den anderen eintreffen, sind wir im Vorteil für den ganzen Abend. (ZS p. 124)

When Felix, passing over her reaction, phones to ascertain that his colleagues are still willing to go along with his intrigue, Trude gives in to him: ‘Das heißt wir gehen doch nicht’ (ZS p. 124). As Trude has verbally attacked Felix’s strategies before and now engages in an action that will benefit him, it is probable that she may have been impressed by Felix’s decisive attitude. His ironic reaction to Trude’s albeit half-hearted agreement again conveys detachment and superiority, which further suggests that Felix’s display of self confidence impresses Trude:

Ich kann dich nicht hindern, Trude. Dann sieht jeder wir sind die Einzigen, die es nicht aushalten einen Abend lang allein miteinander in ihrer Wohnung zu sein. So ist es ja auch. Du hältst es einfach nicht aus. Also bitte, geh schon. Du kannst mich ja entschuldigen dort.... Mit Unpäßlichkeit. Kopfweh. Oder Masern. Falls dir das die Pointe liefert, die du brauchst. (ZS p. 124)

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<sup>195</sup> Compare E. Bollabas, ‘Who’s Afraid of Irony? An Analysis of Uncooperative Behaviour in Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 5 (1981), 123-334.

Irony belongs to the kind of speech acts where ‘intended communicational content and apprehended content differ’.<sup>196</sup> As Altwood points out: ‘Successful irony does not usually involve completely obvious flouting of the norms of the maxim of quality, but leaves the receiver in some doubt whether the norms have been flouted or not.’<sup>197</sup> Trude is uncertain where to place Felix’s utterance:

Felix, laß mich doch zuerst...Ich muß doch zuerst umdenken. Weil ich mich freute. [...] Unter Leuten die ich für Freunde hielt. [...] Und du kauftest mir plötzlich diese schrecklich teuren Ohrringe. [...] Jetzt will man [die] zeigen und plötzlich darf man nicht. (ZS p. 125)

Felix envisages further possibilities to turn the situation in his favour by using a strategy of irony:

Bin’s bloß ich, der hinschaut, hängt dir gleich Blech am Ohr, nicht wahr. (ZS p. 125)

The statement is also an allusion to what turns out to be a message of the play: at some point during the development the couple are forced to admit their dependency on social feedback. A comparable situation is presented in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. George, the husband, recognizes the importance of social constraints, when he announces to the impromptu visitors: ‘Martha is changing...and Martha is not changing for me. Martha hasn’t changed for me in years’.<sup>198</sup> Similarly to Walser, Albee also implies the individual’s endeavours to live up to the demands of society.

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<sup>196</sup> Jens Altwood, ‘Linguistic Communication as Action and Cooperation. A Study in Pragmatics’ (Göteborg: Department of Linguistics. University of Göteborg, 1976), p. 241, as quoted by E. Bollobas, p. 327.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> E. Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, p. 34.

The assertive attitude Felix displayed first on the telephone and then to her, have restored his credibility for Trude who sees it as an affirmation of his manliness since, as the development of the play shows she is eager for Felix to live up to her idea of masculinity, one which for Trude is a necessary attribute to gain social confirmation.

#### 5.1.4 The Function of the Erotic Games

Unlike *Ein fliehendes Pferd* which follows a more realistic pattern, *Die Zimmerschlacht* as mentioned before, contains farcical elements which are especially apparent when the protagonists are seen to make unsuccessful attempts to engage in erotic play.<sup>199</sup> Central to these erotic games is the couple's desire to prove that they can rely on their own resources and that their individual relationship is not dependant on the wider macrocosm of society. They are shown to stage an extensive array of erotic tactics that are bound to fail since they lack authentic feeling and spontaneity. Felix demands – and Trude tries to fall in line with – a specific behaviour that by its nature can only be successful if it is spontaneous and based on real emotional engagement and sexual desire. According to Watzlawick, if someone is asked to engage in a specific type of behaviour, which is seen as spontaneous, then he cannot be spontaneous anymore, because the demand makes spontaneity impossible. Extolling the possibilities of social and sexual freedom that could ensue from their situation – 'FELIX Wir sind allein. Du und ich. Ein Mann und eine Frau.' (ZS p. 125) – suggests planning an action that should be spontaneous and unpremeditated. The reader/auditor is

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<sup>199</sup> The terms *realistic* and *farcical* are used here in a general way: *farcical* refers to a play that is seen as dealing with situations in an absurd way while a more realistic play would be nearer in speech and situation to social and domestic everyday problems.

aware that Felix's efforts to create an erotic climate and Trude's willingness to accept the punctuation he proposes gives way to a series of communicational sequences that seem awkward and stilted.<sup>200</sup> Since Trude falls in line with the punctuation proposed by Felix – 'Ich schließe einfach ab. *Tut es*. Jetzt kannst du nicht mehr hinaus'. TRUDE. Ich will gar nicht.' (ZS p. 125) – Felix feels encouraged to escalate the bald on record strategy by using imperatives – 'Leg dich auf den Boden', 'Also los. Leg dich schon' – strengthening the illocutionary force of these utterances by prosodic means – '*brüllt*: Auf den Boden, sag ich' (ZS p. 126). There is, according to Quigley, 'a strong pressure available in language to promote the responses one wishes to receive',<sup>201</sup> but Quigley recognizes that such expectations are of course not always met and the tension in the dialogue here derives from that refusal. If at this point Trude, albeit reluctantly, is willing to comply – '*Sie legt sich auf den Boden*' and 'Dreh dich auf den Bauch. *Sie tut as*' (ZS p. 126) – the dialogue will soon signal discrepancies in the punctuation of sequences of events, as the following exchange indicates. Finding it difficult to create an erotic climate, Felix tries to stimulate the imagination by extolling the merits of additional props: 'Vielleicht sollte man einen Ventilator haben [...] und ein Kippspiegel [...] der toll rasende Ventilator, der alles zerschleudert und der unverschämt erhabene Kippspiegel, [...]' (ZS pp. 126-27). For Trude this is an opportunity to help Felix enhance his masculinity: 'Bitte, Felix sag mir wenigstens, mit wem hast du das probiert? Gib zu du hast es von dieser blonden Spanierin' (ZS pp. 126-27). The idea that Felix is attractive to other women

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<sup>200</sup> See my elaborations on Watzlawick's axiom 'The Punctuation of the Sequence of Events', section 4.3.1.1.

<sup>201</sup> A. Quigley, *The Pinter Problem* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 174, as quoted by S. Mandala, p. 40.

appeals to Trude who wants to see it as a confirmation of his erotic attributes which, as the development of the play shows, she wants to hold on to as a confirmation of a social role that reflects on her own self esteem. Felix is unable to feign the part of a conqueror: ‘Trude, ich schwör dir, es kam einfach so von selbst, [...]’ (ZS p. 127). The efforts to produce an erotic climate suggest that indications are followed according to popular instruction manuals. The *Kamasutra* is evoked. *The Joys of Sex* (1972),<sup>202</sup> a popular self-help book of the time, also comes to mind as the audience witnesses a hopeless effort by the characters to force reality to conform to dictates or illusions. The resort to these resources together with the consumption of alcoholic beverages are bound to fail as the stage instructions indicate: ‘*Sie gehen auseinander. Setzen sich. Schweigen*’ (ZS p. 133). This signals an impasse in their communication. This somewhat tragic outcome of an often farcical scene refers us back to the play’s title and subtitle: *Die Zimmerschlacht: Ein Übungstück für Eheleute*. The private room, a battleground for married couples to practice their social relations, stands symbolically for the existential weight on the individuals who even in the most intimate situations are called upon to deal with the social function of their relationships. As quoted in the introduction to this section (5.1.1.), A. Wayne’s description of *Die Zimmerschlacht* as ‘Walser’s first piece of comic realistic theatre’ reminds us of the interpretational scope provided by the author’s ability to put language at the centre of his writing. Despite – or rather in support of – the dramatic dimension of the play, farce and comedy are options very much open to directors and actors when staging this play. The tools provided by pragmatics

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<sup>202</sup> Alex Comfort, ed, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Love Making* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972)

prove relevant and useful for either approach. By analyzing and describing the codes which create a space between language and interaction, pragmatic analysis appears to lend itself particularly well to understanding the mechanisms of comedy, farce or satire which respectively aim at amusement, denuciation or ridicule by playing with the numerous facets of humour.

A phone call from a colleague seeking reassurance that Felix is still prepared to stick to their agreement to boycott Benno's party, provides Trude with a new opportunity to request that Felix live up to her idea of manhood. Felix adopts a challenging and assertive mode to destroy any doubts on Mengel's side:

Ich und einlenken. Lieber Mengel! Da rufen Sie also an, weil sie dachten... Wissen Sie, daß mir das richtig weh tut. Doch, doch, in dieser Lage ist Mißtrauen eine Beleidigung. Ein Mann, Herr Mengel, wie selten zeigt sich das noch, daß einer ein Mann ist. Und heute abend, wo es bewiesen werden kann, das erste Mal seit wir uns kennen, da zweifeln Sie... [...] Und falls Ihnen doch noch Zweifel kommen, rufen Sie mich an, ja! (ZS p. 133)

Felix's open accusations of distrust are bald on record strategies since, according to Brown and Levinson's ideas, given the urgent wish for success of his plan, his wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency are greater than his wants to satisfy hearer's face. The last utterance is an imperative that signals expectations of compliance by claiming or asserting power.<sup>203</sup> Trude takes up Felix's display of power towards Mengel for her own purpose: 'Mein Felix kommandiert heute ganz schön herum' and 'Gib mir auch Befehle' (ZS p. 133). Felix's reply hints to the reader/auditor that he is not prepared to continue holding up a myth by feigning a role that, as their interaction shows, he has also been

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<sup>203</sup> Compare my elaborations on Brown and Levinson's bald on record strategies in sections 4.2.1, and 5.2. on Brown and Levinson's work *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*.



performing in the past, for Trude's benefit: 'Immer wenn ich einen Befehl geben soll, hab ich das Gefühl, jetzt versprech ich mich gleich' (ZS p. 133). Trude, on the other hand, ignores the implication contained in Felix's utterance since she is determined to punctuate the sequence of events by manipulating Felix into a role that fits into her idea of manliness. She insists on an account of heroic deeds – 'Du warst doch Offizier (ZS p. 133) and 'Bitte erzähl noch mehr' (ZS p. 134) – which, as the stage instructions indicate to the auditor, Felix has clearly made up for Trude's benefit: '*spielt sich in die Rolle des Helden hinein*' and '*deutlich als Vortrag*' (ZS p. 134), something which Trude on her part is prepared to ignore: 'War es so schrecklich für meinen Felix, einen abzuknallen?' (ZS p. 135).

Nevertheless, the interaction takes a further turn where Felix is no longer able to uphold the myth that makes him into a war hero. Leech's conclusions come to mind that on the one hand it is quite open to the speaker to opt out of the Cooperative Principle, here in the form of the maxim of quality (make your contribution as informative as required) for the purpose of wilfully deceiving the hearer. On the other hand, while one can deceive or misinform, the point about the Cooperative Principle is that if speakers misinform indiscriminately, communication will break down. Felix is unable to uphold the role that, as can be gathered from the afore-going conversation, he had been playing for some time:

FELIX Nein, nein...aber ich will einfach nichts mehr wissen davon. Basta. Verstehst du. In Wirklichkeit war es anders, man fasst zusammen, übertreibt ein bißchen und noch ein bißchen, möglich, die ganze Geschichte ist mir erst im Augenblick eingefallen oder ich hab sie gehört, damals am Radio, im Kasino, ich träumte davon, ich träume ja oft davon, von damals, fliegeruntauglich also Wetterdienst. Herrgott, das weißt du doch und dann verlangst du von mir solche Geschichten. (ZS p. 135)

His refusal to continue playing a part ignites Trude's anger and disappointment:

TRUDE Ja, wie jetzt, dann hast du den gar nicht abgeschossen.

FELIX Ich fürchte nein.

TRUDE lacht grell auf: Und warum erzählst du mir denn sowas?

FELIX Du zwingst mich dazu. (ZS p. 135)

Both characters claim to be only reacting to the other person's attitude without acknowledging that they in turn influence the partner by their own reaction. Felix states that Trude's demand forces him to assume the role of a war hero and a conqueror of women and Trude labels this explanation as a gross and wilful distortion of reality. For the observer it becomes clear that what is at stake is not a simple matter of shifting the blame but the inability of the characters to metacommunicate about their respective contribution to the pattern of the interaction.

### 5.1.5 Symmetrical Escalation

Felix and Trude are no longer able to uphold a myth where they cast each other into a role from which they were able to draw their own self-esteem. Once the couple have openly admitted that they have been acting for their mutual benefit, they feel free to hurl their frustrations at each other. Their recriminations lead to symmetrical escalations, a strategy characterized by competitiveness and the tendency of each interactant to be 'more equal' than the other.<sup>204</sup> This accounts for its typical escalating quality, since every remark by one of the interactants is topped with a remark by the other, in a battle where each participant wants to show his/her superiority. But the fight for one-upmanship is also a struggle about their relationship with the content becoming less and less important as the

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<sup>204</sup> Orwell's famous phrase as quoted by P. Watzlawick et al., p. 107.

characters voice their frustration at failing to hold on to the definition of themselves which the partner is set to destroy. The pattern of behaviour has become such that a competitive situation develops where offence leads to more offence regardless of the harm inflicted on the partner's and by implication on the speaker's own self-esteem. A considerable part of the play demonstrates how Felix and Trude go through an escalating pattern of frustration and self-destruction before they eventually stop from sheer emotional exhaustion. Excerpts from the text will support these conclusions.

Felix's failure to kill a mouse that has been wandering through the house and his suggestion to set up a trap, provides Trude with new material to give voice to her recriminations:

Das ist deine Methode. Fallen stellen. Still heimlich. Hinten herum. Eine Intrige spinnen. Immer so erbärmlich als möglich. Weil Du nicht fähig bist zu einem Schlag. Und mit sowas muß man den Abend verbringen. Das Leben. [...] (ZS p. 138)

Trude calls Felix a liar, 'Du lügst was zusammen [...]', and a faker, 'daß du immer glaubst du mußt dich ausstaffieren [...]' (ZS p. 136). She implies repeatedly that he is spineless and weak and searches for an appropriate form in which to express her contempt and undermine his personality:

Du bist nicht besonders appetitlich. Da, da, du zitterst ja. Du solltest dich sehen, wie du da stehst jetzt, zitternd, nichts als ein Schuppenregen! Von Kopf bis Fuß...ein ...ein Erdkundelehrer! (ZS p. 138)

Felix teaches 'Erdkunde', a minor subject in the school's curriculum that does not appear on the end of the year report, since, as Felix himself points out during the course of the play, 'Erdkunde [ist] kein Versetzungsfach' (ZS p. 142). Belaboring

Felix's professional failure, allows Trude to construct a picture of a dull, incompetent personality.<sup>205</sup> Felix first tries to avert Trude's overtly insulting statements by using passivity and restraints and by issuing a warning – 'Trude!' (ZS p. 138) – in relation to this last utterance. When Trude persists with direct insults – 'Nur zu. Schrei nur. Schrei mich an. Das paßt sehr gut zu dir. Schwächlinge schreien. Das is bekannt' (ZS p. 138) – Felix sees himself as justifiably retaliating in the face of Trude's attacks.

He takes up this last point – 'Ich kann es dir auch leise sagen. Sehr leise sogar' (ZS p. 128) – to counterattack. He does so by affirming that the sole reason for his manipulations not to go to Benno's party was to protect her from being exposed to Benno's much younger wife

[...] Ja, ich habe dich gesch...ge...geschützt. Vor dieser jungen Person. Die über dich triumphiert hätte. Weil sie zwanzig Jahre jünger ist als du. (ZS p. 138)

Felix's purpose is to shatter Trude's self-confidence by comparing her unfavourably to Benno's young wife: 'Glaubst du vielleicht, dieses junge Weibsbild kennt irgend eine Gnade. Das hat sie nicht nötig. Die steht da, vierundzwanzig Jahre alt, rücksichtslos.' (ZS p. 138). He declares how he had in the past always boosted her self-confidence by withholding the truth for the sake of their relationship – 'Du glaubst an dich [...] Weil ich dich an dich glauben machte' (ZS p. 138). Were they to go to Benno's party Trude would be shamelessly ignored – 'ein Mensch wirst du erst wenn du angeschaut wirst' – and

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<sup>205</sup> The situation is comparable to that in Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Martha, like Trude, exposes George's failure to live up to her expectations by attacking his inability to make full use of his social and professional role as an Associate Professor who 'is expected to be somebody, not just some nobody who's so damn...contemplative, he can't make anything of himself [...]'. Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, p. 57.

she would '[...] überhaupt nicht in F...Ff...Frage kommen [...] wenn diese junge P...Person auftritt [...]]' (ZS p. 138). This utterance amounts to what Watzlawick terms disconfirmation, something that in his view is quite different from outright rejection of the other person's definition of him/herself. Rather it negates his/her reality as the source of such a definition. In other words if rejection implies 'you are wrong', disconfirmation implies 'you do not exist.'<sup>206</sup>

Trude responds to the challenge by attacking Felix's physique comparing him unfavourably to Benno which leads to more symmetrical escalations where each sees him/herself as responding to the other but never also as a stimulus to the other's action. They do not realize the full nature of their behaviour, its true circularity. With the help of pragmatic concepts the auditor is able to follow the development of the action: here he witnesses how an out of control symmetrical escalation eventually leads to the overthrow of Felix's and Trude's normal relationship pattern. Yet, even within this acrimonious battle, Trude grasps at one last straw to restore Felix's sexual role and by implication her own self esteem, for which Felix himself offers the starting point:

[...] Siehst du, Trude, das hab ich davon, daß ich alles in mich hineinschlucke. Deine Mängel absorbier ich schweigend wie der Filter den Schmutz. Dir biete ich immer in Verehrung ein makelloses Bild von dir an [...] Du hältst dich für so makellos wie ich dir zuliebe mache. Den Filter siehst du nicht. (ZS p. 139)

Trude takes up this utterance for her own purpose: 'Den reinigst du bei deinen Frauenzimmern, mit denen der Herr Märtyrer mich regelmässig betrügt' (ZS p. 141). On the content level this message appears to be leading to further verbal escalation but it is also a request for a redefinition on the relationship level. Felix,

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<sup>206</sup> See P. Watzlawick et al., point 3.3.3, p. 86. Compare also section 4.3.1.1 of this thesis.

on the other hand, no longer wants to see himself in the role of the male conqueror he had been playing for Trude's sake: 'Ich dich? Wo, wann, mit wem? Bitte?' (ZS p. 139). The following dialogic exchange shows Trude's disappointment:

TRUDE Und warum wird dann bei uns seit Jahren im Bett immer von dieser blonden Spanierin gesprochen?  
 FELIX Du sprichst von ihr.  
 TRUDE Und du nicht?  
 FELIX Weil du es willst. Immer tust du so, als müßtest du mich von ihr zurückerobern. Na ja, und da laß ich mich eben zurückerobern. Das ist ja ganz angenehm.  
 TRUDE schrill verächtlich: Das ist...das ist ungeheuer. [...] (ZS p. 141)

With Felix's help Trude had been made to believe that he was sexually attractive to other women from whom she had to win him back: 'Ich stellte mir vor wie es war mit denen [...] mit meinen Zähnen hab' ich dich herausgebissen aus deren Fleisch. [...]' (ZS p. 142). Felix has deprived Trude of the illusion that had nourished her erotic fantasies and by implication her self-esteem. When she is finally forced to admit that 'she has been duped in the one area where she still believed him [Felix] to be a man' Trude feels entitled to vent her frustration and anger.<sup>207</sup> An expression of Trude's contempt is her full disregard for the maxims of the Politeness Principle, as exemplified in the following extract:

Hör auf, hör auf, es reicht. Und mit sowas war ich verheiratet. Gibt an. Spielt den tollen Mann von Graubünden. Notzucht zwischen Mineralien. Und ich verzeih ihm. Er ist eben ein Mann. Und dann ist er gar keiner. Dann war alles bloß ein Witz. Felix, das kann dir niemand verzeihen. Du bist ein Monstrum. Ein ganz komisches, winziges Monstrum. Ich sehe dich nicht mehr. (ZS p. 141)

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<sup>207</sup> Anthony E. Waine, p. 138.

‘Hör auf’ is a command which according to Leech is an impositive that flouts the tact maxim since its directness increases the degree of impoliteness.<sup>208</sup> A number of accusations follow that culminate in the statement ‘das kann dir niemand verzeihen’ which equally constitutes a violation of the tact maxim: blaming and accusing are expressives that have the ‘function of expressing the speaker’s psychological attitude towards a state of affairs which the illocution presupposes’.<sup>209</sup> The belittling characterization of Felix as ‘ein ganz komisches, winziges kleines Monstrum’ is a gross violation of the approbation maxim which roughly implies ‘avoid saying unpleasant things to others and more particularly about the hearer’.<sup>210</sup> With the utterance ‘Ich sehe dich nicht mehr’ Trude throws a similarly offensive remark at Felix to the one he inflicted on her before (see above). It is a message of disconfirmation which on the metacommunicational level implies that she no longer confirms or rejects Felix but regards him as a non-person. What on the surface simply looks like open conflict is on the relationship level an expression of Trude’s frustration because she sees in Felix’s revelations a disconfirmation of her own self. How deeply Felix’s exposure of his real self has affected her own personal image can be seen from the following utterance:

[...] Es gibt überhaupt nichts, was du nicht kaputt machen kannst. Und ich kann mich wehren wie ich will. Alles ist jetzt lächerlich. Du. Ich. Ich bin verheiratet mit einer komischen kleinen spießigen Nummer. Auf Lebenszeit. Felix, wie krieg ich jetzt wieder zusammen. Daß du was bist. Zum Beispiel ein Mann. (ZB p. 142)

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<sup>208</sup> Compare ‘The Tact Maxim’, in G. Leech, pp. 104-10.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>210</sup> Compare ‘The Approbation Maxim’, *ibid.*, p. 135.

### 5.1.6 Confrontation with Reality

Felix's and later Trude's emotional outbreaks lead to a break down of the dialogic sequences and give way to passionate solo speeches, first by Felix and then by Trude. 'In their respective central monologues', states Anthony Waine, 'they cast off their roles, even those acquired through marriage, and confront each other as themselves'.<sup>211</sup> Their speeches are not consistently structured statements but verbal flows that expose inner feelings and grievances.

While dialogues tend towards a frequent change of semantic direction, these quasi monologues are, on the one hand, semantically more unified, giving the hearer and the audience access to the speaker's consciousness and thought processes and, on the other, so packed with emotional outbursts that they are not stringent statements but loosely strung together utterances which often contradict each other, leaving it to the hearer to bring in his own interpretation. In Felix's speech several levels of language permeate each other. References to himself in the first and in the third person alternate, accusations are contrasted with reconciliation attempts. Offensive utterances are often toned down with irony which is one form that enables the speaker to bypass politeness without being obviously impolite, a strategy Felix uses to initiate his attack on Trude:

Falls dich das interessiert: ich hab dich zwar nie betrogen, aber ich hab dir immer viel verschwiegen. Gesagt hab ich nur, was dir gut tun sollte. [...] Ein Mann schluckt nicht und schweigt und schont und schont. Ein Mann packt aus. Gut, liebe Trude, ich befrei dich vom Krankenwärter und liefere dir endlich was du brauchst, das bisschen Mann [...] (ZS p. 142)

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<sup>211</sup> Anthony E. Waine, p. 233.



During the course of the speech Felix resorts repeatedly to the utterances ‘Falls dich das interessiert’ (six times, once ‘falls dich das noch interessiert’) and ‘liebe Trude’ (three times) breaching the Maxim of Quality (try to make your contribution one that is true) by implicature rather than by direct statement. These utterances are obviously insincere since they purport a concern and consideration for the hearer which contrasts with the otherwise aggressive wording they are embedded in. In reality their conflict has come to a point where Felix’s outrage is such that he is not prepared to spare Trude’s feelings. Brown and Levinson’s reflections would explain Felix’s attitude: a speaker who carries out an FTA without redressive strategy indicates that his desire to apply an FTA with maximum efficiency is greater than his desire to preserve the hearer’s face. An FTA will be done in this way when the speaker does not fear retribution from the hearer: here Felix has come to a point where his emotional state is such that he feels that this is no longer a consideration.<sup>212</sup>

Felix now admits that he has personally met Benno and his young wife – ‘Die vierundzwanzigjährige und er’ (ZS p. 142) – and that in reality it was not Trude he wanted to protect as he had falsely indicated before (ZS, see p. 16) but himself: ‘Nicht dich wollte ich schützen vor ihr. Nur mich, liebe Trude’ (ZS p. 143). Intrigue was the only way he could think of to resist the overwhelming feeling of envy and admiration that overcame him at the sight of Benno and his wife:

[...] dein kleiner spießiger Erdkundelehrer, der doch nur darunter leidet, daß Erdkunde kein Versetzungsfach ist, dem die Haare schwinden [...] dieser fast schon endgültig karikierte und durch und durch komische Erdkundelehrer empfand die Vierundzwanzigjährige als einen Schlag, dem er nichts entgegenzusetzen hatte als eine Intrige [...]. So hat die

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<sup>212</sup> Compare my elaboration in section 4.2.1 of this thesis.

Vierundzwanzigjährige deinem Felix zugesetzt. Und Felix fühlte sich fast als Mann. (ZS p. 143)

This excerpt serves as an indication of the tone that runs through Felix's entire solo speech: if on the one hand he does not spare Trude's feelings, it appears on the other that he is prepared to undermine his own self-image as well. Nevertheless Leech's observations come to mind that since pragmatic principles are regulative rather than constitutive, conversational utterances are seldom clearly defined. Some can be highly ambivalent and one illocution can be intended to fulfil more than one goal. If Felix appears to deride his own image, he also wants to prove to Trude that he is able to invalidate her accusations. He ironises Trude's derogatory utterances (see above 'dein kleiner spießiger Erdkundelehrer') implying what he will later affirm, that, unlike Trude, Benno's young wife has the power to excite his erotic feelings and make him feel 'fast wie ein Mann' (see above). The statement 'Wie muß es dich freuen zu hören, daß ich, seit ich die Vierundzwanzigjährige sah, nichts mehr möchte als sie' (ZS p. 143) introduces a string of superlatives to describe Benno's wife, his resentment towards Benno and his intention to overpower Trude with bald on record strategies, that is FTAs without redressive action, as the following examples indicate: 'Alles an ihr ist vierundzwanzig, Trude. Jedes Haar, jeder Zahn und Fingernagel [...]' and 'Benno sieht natürlich sofort daß mich die Vierundzwanzigjährige sozusagen verbrennt [...] wie er sie hinstellt vor mich, als sein prächtiges Eigentum auf höchsten Beinen, mit einer Brust zu der man hinaufbellern möchte [...]' (ZS p. 143). Felix exacerbates his bald on record strategy declaring that Trude does not count in a world where only youth meets the demands of society:

[...] rundherum wimmelt es von Vierundzwanzigjährigen. Und Felix fühlt sich fast als Mann. Falls überhaupt noch, denkt er dann mit denen. Hier gilt was bewußtlos macht. Und das bist nicht du. Das sind sie. Die jungen Geschöpfe. Vollkommen wie ein guter Industrieartikel. Die qualifizierte erotische Norm. Was drunter bleibt kommt nicht in Frage. Für einen Mann. [...] (ZS p. 144)

Part of Felix's bald on record strategy is aimed at retaliating against Trude's attacks on his lack of manliness and his erotic failures. He will have one more go at undermining Trude's self confidence by declaring that, as she is incapable of arousing him sexually, he is unable to fulfil her erotic expectations – 'als der Mann den du verlangst' (ZS p. 144) – as the only possibility of experiencing sexual intercourse with her would be in the form of a routine: 'Das wäre natürlich noch möglich, liebe Trude. Wir verrichten das als etwas hygienisches. Wie Fingernägelschneiden. Als einen Akt der Körperpflege' (ZS p. 144). Whether from sheer exhaustion at going through an escalating pattern of frustration or the realization that revealing their feelings has led to mutual abuses that have a damaging effect on their relationship, Felix now attempts to switch over to what look like reconciliation strategies. His repeated requests for a reaction from Trude – 'Die Fenster klirren so schweigst du', 'Du willst mich kaputtschweigen', 'Schweig nur weiter' (ZS p. 144) – signals that she is unwilling to respond. In an attempt to obtain a reaction, Felix modifies his approach by offering a justification for his behaviour:

Du willst mich also kaputtschweigen, gib's zu. Oder bist du einfach zerschmettert. Bitte, du hast mich ja auch zerschmettert. Also mußte ich beweisen: ich kann dich auch zerschmettern. Sonst sagst du gleich wieder, ich bin kein Mann. (ZS p. 144)

The following offer of reconciliation is a final attempt at metacommunicating about his utterances by trying to defuse his verbal attack:

Gut, ich rede mal so hin an dich. Aber es tut mir doch genauso weh wie dir. Trude, hörst du? Unter dem Vorwand, die Wahrheit zu sagen, gestatten wir uns jede Gemeinheit. Wenn das die Wahrheit ist, Trude, dann laß uns wieder lügen. (ZS p. 145)

Grice's framework provides a suitable explanation for this last observation:

‘Unter dem Vorwand die Wahrheit zu sagen, gestatten wir uns jede Gemeinheit’ (ZS p. 145). According to Grice the Cooperative Principle and its maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner) define the basic set of assumptions underlying every talk exchange. This would not imply that utterances must in general meet these conditions since the majority of conversations do not proceed in such a brusque fashion at all. As has been explained in the theoretical part of this thesis, both Leech and Brown and Levinson suggest that without the interplay of what Leech defines as the Politeness Principle and its maxims and Brown and Levinson as the attention to face, conversations would break down. Felix's and Trude's unambiguous, bald on record communications, which at this point they believe to be true and justified, do not make use of any redressive strategies. Had they been able to apply what Brown and Levinson describe as the off record strategy by flouting for instance the maxim of relation (be relevant) they could have had room for maintaining plausible deniability.

At this point Trude is not prepared to follow Felix's offer to reconsider the strategies in their interaction, claiming instead for herself the same rights to reveal her own feelings. She introduces what turns out to be a solo speech with a neutral non-verbal attitude:

*[...] Nach seinem [Felix's] letzten Wort ist es noch eine Zeitlang still. Dann fängt Trude an. Ganz und gar ruhig, ohne jede Aggressivität [...] Sie will ihrem Mann überhaupt nicht widersprechen. Sie muß lediglich dem was er sagte, etwas*

*hinzufügen. Nicht gegen ihn, nicht um ihretwillen, sondern um der allgemeinen Wahrheit willen [...]. Deshalb kann sie so ruhig und fast wie unbeteiligt sprechen. (ZS p. 145)*

With the following initial statement she emphasizes this attitude of non-commitment:

Das tut uns gut. So ein bisschen Wahrheit. Nicht gleich wieder die Hände heben und beschwichtigen [...] (ZS p. 145).

Their interaction has in her view turned more and more into a ritual with politeness being maintained through repetitive, prepatterned behaviour and gestures that seem carefully rehearsed and thought over:

Andauernd ist man besorgt...daß ja nichts passiert...richtig gelähmt ...vor lauter Beschwichtigungssucht [...] jeden Tag muß man noch mehr aufpassen. [...] eine natürliche Bewegung und alles bricht auseinander. Also bewegen wir uns umeinander herum. Glockenspielfiguren, das Zeremoniell klappt [...]. (ZS p. 145)

The above statement is an assessment of the situation between herself and Felix which according to Leech would be classified under assertives. Such illocutions are statements that commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition and tend to be neutral as regards politeness.<sup>213</sup>

Since Felix had voiced his feelings openly – ‘[...] daß du endlich einmal was gesagt hast, was klinkt, als sei es wirklich das, was du denkst’ (ZS p. 145) – she feels entitled to vent her own deeply felt frustration resulting from his disappointing sexual performance. The following excerpt indicates how Trude tries at first to mitigate her face threatening strategy by repeatedly depersonalizing

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<sup>213</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 125.

the subject, inserting the indefinite article – ‘einen Mann’ twice, ‘Ein Mann’ once, ‘eine Frau twice’ – before attacking Felix directly:

[...] eine Frau müßte eigentlich ablehnen. Sobald sie sieht, daß ihre Erfahrungen endgültig sind, müßte sie sagen: nein, danke! Anstatt sich abzufinden. Aber nein, sie legt sich immer wieder hin, unter diesen e i n e n, unzureichenden, überhaupt nicht in Frage kommenden Mann. Immer wieder erwartet sie mehr als ihn. [...] (ZS p. 146)

According to Brown and Levinson certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee. Trude’s bald on record strategy brings to mind some of those acts outlined by Brown and Levinson that express negative evaluations like disapproval and contempt thereby threatening (potentially) the hearer’s wants as the following excerpt indicates:

[...]... du kommst...aber auch nur aus Gewohnheit...von dem Sog spürst du nichts...ich kann dir nicht einmal verständlich machen, wie enttäuschend das ist, wenn du kommst anstatt Manhattan oder sonstwas du zählst nicht, hast noch nie gezählt... [...] Und das Schlimmste Felix: ich darf dich nicht einmal merken lassen, wie wenig du zählst. [...] (ZS p. 146).

The utterance ‘du zählst nicht, hast noch nie gezählt’ is again a message of disconfirmation that, as has been explained before, negates the validity of the other as a person, an insult which both partners have thrown at each other (ZS see pp. 20 and 22 ) during the interaction.

Felix and Trude have been going through an escalating pattern of frustration that once underway cannot easily be stopped. One way to revert to the former ‘normal’ mode of communication would be to step outside the pattern and

communicate about it. The attempt was made by Felix (see above) but Trude saw his solo speech as an opportunity to voice her own frustrations at his sexual ineptness. Where no change is generated from within, an outside intervention presents a possibility of supplying what at this point the interaction itself cannot generate. A phone call from Benno, aware of Felix's intrigue yet ready to forgive and urging them to come to the party which is in full swing, triggers a process of awareness that bitter accusations and exposing each other's vulnerabilities are bound to destroy a relationship that is built on mutual dependency: 'FELIX So Trude. Jetzt. Bitte. Verrat. Ringsum Verrat. Alle sind umgefallen' (ZS p. 147). The realization that they are ultimately forced to rely on each other makes clear that they have gone beyond what is permissible for a partnership to survive:

FELIX Was ich alles sagte, so im Laufe...des Abends  
 TRUDE Ich doch auch.  
 FELIX Wie zwei Hochverräter haben wir uns benommen.  
 TRUDE Wir können uns das einfach nicht leisten. (ZS p. 148)

After having thrown FTAs at each other indiscriminately, Trude and Felix go over to apologies. According to Leech apologies express regret for an offence committed by speaker against hearer, here for offences committed on both sides, that can be regarded as an acknowledgement of an imbalance in the relationship between speakers and hearers and as an attempt to restore or at least reduce the disequilibrium.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

### 5.1.7 Return to the old System

As Felix and Trude become aware of the damaging effect their aggressive behaviour has on the function of a marriage partnership where actions and reactions are so interdependent, they are finally forced to admit they have no choice but to agree on areas of understanding for its survival. As Helmut Karasek notes: '[...] dieser Kampf [ist] das Schädlichste für diese Symbiose, für diese auf Autarkie angewiesene Gemeinschaft'.<sup>215</sup> It takes several new failed attempts at staging the scene for an evening on their own before they have to accept albeit reluctantly, that the survival of their relationship is dependent on the wider social macrocosm. Walser comments on the play:

Diesmal hat dieser Versuch eines Ehestücks ergeben, daß ein Ehepaar ohne Anschluß an die Gesellschaft sozusagen erkranken muß – daß diese Zelle, diese berühmte Familienzelle, allein nicht lebensfähig ist. Das Stück hat eine solche Konstellation, daß eigentlich Gesellschaft vorkäme, aber durch eine Maßnahme des Mannes muß diese Ehe an diesem Abend allein auskommen, und es zeigt sich, daß sie dazu nicht imstande ist.<sup>216</sup>

Felix's outrage at and rejection of Benno's offer to them to join the party – 'Mir jetzt noch sowas anzubieten: hier seid ihr immer herzlich gern gesehen. Mir das anzubieten. [...]' (ZS p. 147) – is followed by the realization that to go to the party would be the one sensible move on their part. To make their decision more acceptable they reassure each other of their mutual support:

TRUDE: Hin zu den anderen. Ganz frech. Und ganz einig. Wir treten auf. Geschlossen. Das würde uns helfen. Ich halte dich. Du hältst mich. Untrennbar. [...] (ZS p. 152)

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<sup>215</sup> Erhard Friedrich, Siegfried Melchinger, eds, 'Helmut Karasek, 'Abschied von der Politik?' Helmut Karasek unterhält sich mit Martin Walser über dessen neues Stück 'Die Zimmerschlacht', *Theater Heute*, (Velber bei Hanover: Friedrich Verlag, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p. 8.



To make it easier to confront the forthcoming gathering they persuade themselves into believing that Benno and his new partner need not be taken seriously – ‘Wir lachen. Zeigen denen, daß wir ganz irrsinnig zusammengehören.’ (ZS p. 152) – and they also undermine the new wife’s status as in the following excerpt:

TRUDE Ich werde dieser Person..., wie heißt die eigentlich?

FELIX Rosa.

TRUDE *lacht künstlich hoch*: Nein, Felix, bitte, im Ernst, wie heißt sie.

FELIX Rosa, ich schwör’s Er nennt sie allerdings Rose.

TRUDE Das wird ihm wenig nützen. (ZS p. 153)

The reader/audience is aware that the couple’s overtly emphatic effort to reassure themselves that they are in command of the situation conceals their apprehension at having to face a party they were in the first place determined to shun. Flouting the maxim of quality (do not say what you believe to be false) makes it easier to accept that their attempt at staging an evening in isolation has failed. Trude and Felix have had to come to the conclusion that for their relationship to survive certain rules must not be trespassed on the one hand and on the other they need to live up to the challenges presented by the society they live in.

Pragmatic categories were useful in providing an insight into the different phases they go through before coming to a viable compromise for their partnership to work. From the point of view of pragmatics, by opting out of the quality principle, Felix and Trude are wilfully deceiving each other (and by reference themselves). I refer in this connection to my elaborations in section 4.1.2 on Leech’s statement that speakers can deceive or misinform, but if they did so indiscriminately communication would break down. By assuming that the CP principle is normally followed, communicational values such as truthfulness are

brought into the study of communication. On the other hand Leech states that so long as the values we consider are the ones we suppose on empirical grounds to be operative in society he sees no reason to exclude them from this study. On dramatic works as also here, it can be said that the CP is still maintained on the writer reader level as the reader is in a position to comprehend the intention of the author. Pragmatic categories made it possible to analyse how language is used in dialogue, its effect on the interactants and the significance of what the utterances imply. The analysis has also made clear that the discourse level between the playwright and the reader/viewer is as significant for the understanding of the play as the interaction between characters. As the action develops audiences and readers have been able to construct a picture of the relationship between Felix and Trude. What appears to be a violation of the maxim of quality (speak the truth, be sincere) on the character level is still maintained on the writer/reader level who are, made aware of Felix's manipulations to hide from Trude his real motivation for not going to Benno's party, before she herself realizes that Felix has been deceiving her. The play is built from dialogue that implies more than what is said and the different frameworks derived from pragmatics have shown that they are designed to account for these kinds of spoken as well as unspoken utterances. A synthesis of the analysis will show how pragmatic categories are relevant for an understanding of the meaning of the plays.

Relevant information has been given off-record first and made explicit later. Flouting of the maxims of the Politeness Principle on Felix's part are accepted by Trude but questioned on the playwright/reader level because as the plot develops the readers/auditors are given enough information to see through Felix's manipulations. To convince Trude of the impossibility of going to Benno's party

Felix is determined to resort to a number of diverse strategies such as irony, self-fulfilling prophecies, concealment in the form of off-record strategies and disregard of the Politeness Principle when it comes to describing Benno and his new wife. Only when Felix's concerns with Benno's young wife becomes so obvious that Trude cannot ignore it any longer, does she retaliate by flouting the Politeness Principle, resorting to on-record strategies as well as to irony and tactlessness. The desire to blame one another for destroying their own self-confidence leads to symmetric escalations where they do not spare each other's feelings by exchanging FTA's without redressive strategies. It takes the intervention of a third party – the phone call from Benno – to acknowledge the necessity to restore the balance by finding a viable compromise for their relationship to work. The *dénouement* shows that flouting the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle – here the quality maxim – is a reasonable way of making their decision to go to the party acceptable. As has been explained and shown in the analysis of the play most interactions need not follow all of Grice's maxims to be successful: Felix and Trude try to make their decision to go to Benno's party more bearable by telling each other that they are making a free choice. Here the Gricean cooperative principle that is violated between the characters is still maintained on the author reader level where non-fulfillment of the maxims is always goal oriented and therefore part of the action. The question remains at the end of the play whether it is possible to find a way to harmonize the desire for self-determination with the requirements to follow the rules of the group.

## 5.2 Ein fliehendes Pferd

### 5.2.1 Origin and Synopsis

Solange etwas ist, ist es nicht das, was es gewesen sein wird. Wenn etwas vorbei ist, ist man nicht mehr der, dem es passierte. Allerdings ist man dem näher als anderen. Obwohl es die Vergangenheit, als sie Gegenwart war, nicht gegeben hat, drängt sie sich jetzt auf, als habe es sie so gegeben, wie sie sich jetzt aufdrängt. (Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen*)<sup>217</sup>

In order to engage in the study of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* it is necessary to look at the novella of the same title from which the play originated. *Ein fliehendes Pferd* was in some ways a turning point in Walser's career: on the one hand, it indicated Walser's intention to turn away from his earlier political view towards a more subjective approach and, on the other, the novella, acclaimed by the public as well as the critics, became a bestseller. Although Walser had been a well-established writer for quite some time, *Ein fliehendes Pferd* was his most successful work up to that date. The renowned critic Marcel Reich-Ranicky, who in the spring of 1976 had sharply criticized Walser's novella *Jenseits der Liebe*, saw it as 'sein reifstes, sein schönstes und bestes Buch'. It was, according to Reich-Ranicky, 'ein Glanzstück deutscher Prosa dieser Jahre, indem sich Martin Walser als Meister der Beobachtung und der Psychologie, als Virtuose der Sprache bewährt' and in a more comprehensive review six weeks later he declared 'Selten wird in der deutschen Literatur der Gegenwart die Alltagssprache der Intellektuellen so genau und so entlarvend eingefangen'.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag), p. 9.

<sup>218</sup> For Reich-Ranicky's review of *Jenseits der Liebe* see Jörg Magenau, p. 343. For his review of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* see Marcel Reich Ranicki, 'Walser's Glanzstück' and 'Martin Walsers Rückkehr zu sich selbst'. Both in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 January and 4 March 1978 respectively.

The novella *Ein fliehendes Pferd* was first published in February 1978 and adapted to become a play in 1985 by Walser together with Ulrich Khuon, the then artistic director of the 'Stadttheater Konstanz'. The play marked the opening of the season of the *Meersburger Sommertheater*, brought into being by Walser and Rolf Hochhuth, on 19 July 1985. The production was successful as after the opening there were twelve additional performances which were all sold out. The majority of the reviews were positive, although the weekly *Der Spiegel* missed 'die Detailliebe und Genauigkeit, nach der Walsers Text in seiner dekuvierenden Vielseitigkeit im Neurotischen, Obszönen und Verletzbaren verlangt, wenn er nicht ins Deklamatorisch-Satirische abrutschen soll'.<sup>219</sup> To fully meet this requirement would be very difficult as the novella focuses strongly on Helmut's view by allowing the reader full insight into his inner thoughts and feelings. It should be noted however that the masterly construction of dialogue in the play has, as will be seen, precisely achieved the task of delineating the neurotic, obscene and vulnerable traits that distinguish the different characters. I judge the adaptation of the novella into the play to be quite successful. The language is geared to the stage-requirements without affecting the meaning of the story. The version is well suited for the purpose of my analysis but I find it useful to give an overview of the different adaptations for television, film and radio as it reveals how difficult the process of adaptation can be. Walser himself adapted *Ein fliehendes Pferd* as a radio play that was broadcast by the *Bayrische Rundfunk* and also directed by Walser on 17 March 1986. A few days later, on 26 March 1986, Peter Beauvais directed an adaptation for ARD television based on a script by Ulrich Plenzdorf. Shortly before its production, Walser had been asked by Peter

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<sup>219</sup> 'Ins Wasser gestoßen', in *Der Spiegel* 29 July 1985.

Beauvais to revise the script which nevertheless in hindsight he perceived as a ‘Katastrophe’ since it had in his own words, ‘nur die Novelle geplündert’.<sup>220</sup> In an interview in *Die Zeit* in 2007 Walser comments that Plenzdorf’s adaptation kept too close to the text of the novella, making it look more like a documentary:

[...] wenn sich ein Film so an die literarische Vorlage hält, muss er scheitern. Man muss den Roman als Steinbruch benutzen, den man zerbricht, zerstört, Stein für Stein abträgt, sonst wird kein Film daraus, sondern eine Dokumentation.<sup>221</sup>

In contrast, the critic Benedikt Erenz, also for *Die Zeit*, valued the script positively as ‘buchgetreu’ and an ‘ausgesprochen gelungene Filmfassung eines schwierigen Textes’.<sup>222</sup>

Finally, a new film version was made in 2007 directed by Rainer Kaufmann with Ulrich Noethen as Helmut, Ulrich Tukur as Klaus, Katja Riemann as Sabine and Petra Schmidt-Schaller as Hel. The Film reached a total of around 400.000 filmgoers and is available on DVD. Walser who had been involved in the writing of the script was, according to Julia Encke, more than pleased with the result. In fact, in his own words, he was ‘ungeheuer glücklich’. He was not interested in bringing into the film as much as possible of the original text as for him faithfulness to the original consists in keeping to the dominant theme, not

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<sup>220</sup> Eckhard Fuhr, ‘Das ungeheure Glück des Martin Walser’, *Welt Online* 13 September 2007 <<http://www.welt.de/kultur/article1180264/Das-ungeheure-Glueck-des-Martin-Walser.html>> [accessed 27 July 2015].

<sup>221</sup> See Jan Freitag, ‘Gottschalk ist ein göttlicher Bub’ Interview mit Martin Walser in der ZEIT vom 22.3.07, <<http://www.zeit.de/online/2007/12/interview-martin-walser?page=all>> [accessed 27 July, 2015].

<sup>222</sup> Benedikt Erenz, ‘Kampf am Bodensee’ in *Die Zeit*, 21 March 1986.

reproducing the text itself.<sup>223</sup> The action of the film is openly erotic, it deals with relationships and cross-relationships between two couples and, contrary to the original work, lays hardly any claim to social criticism. By contrast, the novella and the play into which it was converted, that deal with the battle between two individuals, the one resigned to a bourgeois way of life, the other a provocative free thinker, give a critical account of a specific part of the sociocultural picture at the time they were produced.

A synopsis of the play version of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* will be useful for an analysis of the dialogue based on pragmatic linguistic concepts. The aim is to show how the language of the text is instrumental in constructing characters and determining the thematic focus of the play by revealing what speakers mean in the actual situations in which they find themselves and by showing how this enables readers and viewers to piece together the truth of their relationship. *Ein fliehendes Pferd* deals with the reencounter of two middle-aged characters, Klaus Buch and Helmut Halm, in a holiday resort located on Lake Constance where they are both vacationing with their wives. They have not seen each other since their high school and university days and their lifestyles have developed in a very different fashion. Helmut, a teacher at a prestigious high school, and his wife Sabine have opted for a quiet and sedentary life. Klaus, divorced from his first wife, is married to the much younger and attractive Hel. Klaus and Hel appear to lead a very active and healthy existence, they sail, play tennis, do not drink alcohol but only mineral water and enjoy, as Helmut and Sabine are given to understand verbally and also through unmistakable body language, an active and fulfilling sexual

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<sup>223</sup> See Julia Encke, 'Biedermann am Bodensee: Ein fliehendes Pferd' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 19 September 2007.

relationship. Helmut perceives the appearance of the other couple as a threat to the status quo of the social isolation he has achieved and wishes to preserve, while to Sabine they represent a chance to escape the predictable and uneventful routine to which she had resigned herself. Klaus is determined to shake Helmut out of his position of social withdrawal by confronting him with an openly assertive and life-affirming attitude. Klaus's bold and embarrassing language and his equally impudent erotic gestures towards Hel are designed, on the one hand, to make his own lifestyle palatable to Helmut and, on the other, to assert his superiority, especially on the sexual terrain. The confrontation of these four characters and their incompatible aims will eventually lead to a catastrophe. Before going on a sailing expedition and in the absence of the women, Klaus boldly incites Helmut to give up his sedentary lifestyle, including giving up Sabine, and share his and Hel's apparently exciting existence. The first act ends with Helmut and Klaus going off on a sailing trip regardless of the storm signals.

The second act shows Hel and Sabine who have been waiting for several hours for the men to return from sailing, in front of a table set for a cold meal. The storm, that had reached a dangerous wind force while Helmut and Klaus were at sea, has meanwhile calmed down. Sabine is greatly worried and full of self-reproach, as she had incited Helmut to go sailing. Not so Hel, who seems very relaxed and, in Klaus's absence, throws overboard all her health fanaticisms, obviously dictated by Klaus, giving way to unrestrained drinking, eating and smoking. Eventually Helmut returns alone. On the assumption that Klaus has drowned, Hel reveals in a vehement monologue how deceiving Klaus's self-confident attitude was, as in reality he saw himself as a failure. He was consumed by self-doubt and his working life was far from successful. On the one hand, she



had to reassure him constantly that he was not the worthless character he imagined himself to be but, on the other, he did not allow Hel to develop her own personality. Hel had studied music but Klaus prevented her from carrying out her profession, up to the point of forcing her to sell her piano and making her conduct interviews and write books on health advice instead, an activity that was related to his own occupation, giving him the opportunity to assert his superiority over her. As Hel reveals in the end, Klaus saw in his meeting with Helmut, the stable and self-confident friend from his youth, new hope to help him out of a desperate situation. Contrary to expectations Klaus survives the storm and walks into the Halm's apartment. He orders Hel to leave with him, she obeys and the couple go without Helmut and Klaus even glancing at each other. The question whether Helmut had intentionally tried to drown Klaus or whether he only wanted to save himself remains open. Whereas in the novella Helmut and Sabine leave their holiday resort abruptly with Helmut promising to confess his innermost motivations, the play ends with Sabine insisting and Helmut finally agreeing to face the other couple and to offer, if not complete honesty, at least some sort of amends.

For the purposes of this analysis it is of special interest to look at the relationship between honesty and concealment that the author signals to readers and viewers between the lines of the dialogue he constructs for the characters through hints and suggestions.

### **5.2.2 Group Dynamics and Communication**

The text of the play is determined by limitations which do not constrain the novella where the narrator is aligned with Helmut Halm, giving prominence to

Halm's interior monologues. In the dramatic version the reader/auditor is much more dependent on the dialogue and it is left to him to look for a hidden meaning beyond what is actually said. The four characters are directly exposed to the effect of each other's verbal actions. In their speech behaviour the reader/auditor recognizes their verbal reality as well as their motivations and the subjective expectations they have of each other. The various situations in which the characters are placed allow for different kinds of speech that give the reader/auditor an insight into their behavioural attitudes. When the familial interaction between Helmut and Sabine with which the play opens and closes is not submitted to outside control, they verbalize their expectations and self-awareness more freely. The interaction between Helmut and Klaus that is significant for the development of the play shows a different kind of speech behaviour: Helmut's laconism, his refusal to share Klaus's reminiscences of their school and student times together, his reluctance to allow an insight into his private life, let alone into his emotional feelings, stand in stark contrast to Klaus's speech behaviour. Klaus's language lays open his feelings, he uses swear words, exaggerations, youth slang, anglicisms, vulgar expressions, obscenities. His language is aggressive, inconsiderate and egotistic in such a way that it does not leave space for the others present to articulate their own speech requirements. The female characters' speech is more sensitive, understanding, emotional, friendly and realistic. These qualities are especially noticeable in Hel, when Klaus's aggressiveness fails to impress, when his narcissistic attitude crumbles and when she is free to articulate herself without the inhibiting presence of Klaus. Sabine repeatedly articulates her sensitive awareness of Helmut's psychological mood as

well as her honest assessment of his failure to consider her own requirements and those of others around him.

After providing a general assessment of the individual's speech characteristics, in the following the categories of pragmatic linguistics will be applied to allow a detailed analysis of the interaction between them by showing how the characters and their motivations are constructed through the dialogue, how they use and fail to use speech and how they want their utterances to be understood by their counterparts.

### 5.2.3 Helmut and Sabine: Avoidance against Persuasion

The action takes place in Helmut's and Sabine's rented holiday flat – 'Ferienwohnung im Hause Zürn' (FP p. 9) – and in this first part of the play the Buchs are not on the scene. It is clear from Helmut's and Sabine's attitudes that the other couple, whom they have run into on the promenade, will shortly arrive at their flat to take them on a trip in their sailing boat. Helmut's and Sabine's positions are well defined and made clear through verbal – as well as body– language. While Sabine is only too happy to follow Klaus's and Hel's suggestion, Helmut is equally determined to reject their offer since by joining them they will inevitably be drawn into a relationship which he wants to avoid. The following stage instructions reveal their contrasting attitudes: Sabine '*hat sich zum segeln umgezogen. Sie weiß nicht ob sie so gehen kann oder soll. Sie hätte gerne eine Reaktion ihres Mannes*' (FP p. 9). Helmut on the other hand refrains from showing any kind of reaction: '[...] *sitzt, so wie er von der Promenade zurückkam, im Sessel. Der Strohhut auf dem Tisch [...]*' (FP p. 9) and '*sieht sie, nimmt sie wahr, aber er reagiert nicht. Er schwitzt, brüht, ist deprimiert, hat keine*

*Lust, möchte alles verhindern*' (FP p. 9). Rejection has, according to Watzlawick, as much message character as acceptance of communication and Helmut's unwillingness to interact with Sabine indicates that he tries to avoid the commitment inherent in any form of communication.<sup>224</sup>

Sabine is determined to break down Helmut's defenses and since he cannot physically withdraw without grossly contravening the rules of good behaviour, he will have to find new strategies with which to hold on to his determination to avoid a relationship with the other couple. She is set on imposing her own punctuation as the forceful tone of voice, '*etwas laut, fast schrill*', in which she ignores Helmut's attitude indicates: 'Um drei kommen die. Willst du so aufs Boot. [...] Im Anzug auf eine Jolle, ja?' (FP p. 9). Since Helmut does not react, Sabine resorts to a self-fulfilling prophecy, based on the premise that her opposite will have to react in the defensive manner she herself will have provoked. According to Watzlawick, a self-fulfilling prophecy may be regarded as a communicational equivalent of 'begging the question'. It is behaviour that brings about in others the reaction that would be the appropriate response to the original action.<sup>225</sup> Sabine's aggressive manner can be seen as a provocation disguised as defense, thus involving further interactional strategies like disqualification or denial of communication with the effect of progressive involvement:

SABINE Ich sehe dir's doch an. Schieb nur wieder alles auf mich. Weil ich immer an der Promenade essen will, Leute anschauen will, haben wir dieses Paar getroffen, ja? Aber er ist dein Freund. (FP pp. 9-10)

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<sup>224</sup> Compare my elaborations on Watzlawick's axiom 'The Impossibility of not Communicating' in section 4.3.1.1 of this thesis.

<sup>225</sup> See Watzlawick et al, pp. 98-99. See also my elaborations on Watzlawick in section 4.3.1.1, 'The impossibility of not Communicating'.

Helmut's attitude of rejection – '*lehnt ab*' (*FP* p. 10) – clearly expresses his unwillingness to follow up the subject but since Sabine is determined to pursue her aim, Helmut will have to give in and make conversation:

SABINE [...] von dem erfähr ich in einer Stunde mehr über dich als von dir in fünfundzwanzig Jahren.  
 HELMUT Bloß was.  
 SABINE Mich hat es interessiert.  
 HELMUT Mich angeekelt. (*FP* p. 10)

It will be noted from the above that both Sabine's and Helmut's interaction implies more than is verbally expressed: Sabine signals her dislike of Helmut's attitude of concealment which, as she repeatedly hints during the development of the play, is a typical form of behaviour, one which is also part of Helmut's attitude towards her. The expression '*mich angeekelt*' is a violation of the maxim of quality since it is stronger than warranted for the occasion and in this context is meant to convey contempt. The statement that follows is equally derogatory: Helmut equates Klaus's behaviour to that of the numerous former pupils he runs into from time to time – '*Zuerst habe ich wirklich geglaubt dieser Klaus Buch sei ein früherer Schüler von mir. Der sieht doch zwanzig Jahre jünger aus als ich*' (*FP* p. 10). He hates the manner in which these former pupils demand to be recognized up to a point where they find it unnecessary to give their names:

Wie ich das hasse, man sitzt irgendwo, plötzlich steht so ein Kerl vor dir, so ein Ehemaliger, grüßt, streckt dir die Hand hin, nicht einmal seinen Namen sagt er, ihn muß man kennen, das kann er verlangen. (*FP* p. 10)

The remark again implies much more than what is said as Helmut deliberately flouts the maxim of quality (do not say what you believe to be false) to undermine

Klaus's status by placing him into the role of one of the many anonymous pupils that cross his path in his role as a teacher. In this connection it is important to state that pragmatic principles are regulative, not constitutive and can conflict with one another. They are a necessary part of pragmatics in that they can explain how speakers mean more than what they say: on the one hand Helmut asserts his superiority over Klaus, on the other, the reader can also detect an unspoken meaning in the above statement. His admission that Klaus looks so much younger than himself suggests that he feels inferior to his former friend,

The remaining interaction between Helmut and Sabine before the Buch's appearance on the scene shows the determination on both sides to impose their own punctuation and the other's unwillingness to give in. Helmut resorts to hyperboli for the response he wishes, a technique that violates the maxim of quality since the choice of words is stronger than warranted in the context: 'Fremde, die einen einfach ansprechen, begehen damit ein dem Hausfriedensbruch vergleichbares Delikt' (*FP* p. 11). Sabine invalidates Helmut's communication by offering her own interpretation: she admires the other couple's active lifestyle that Helmut rejects as 'Grauenhaft' (*FP* p. 11). Instead her assessment implies criticism of their own lifestyle and of Helmut's tendency to screen himself off from the outside world: 'Ich fände es gut, wenn Klaus und Helmut uns ein bisschen herausreißen würden aus unserem Trott' (*FP* p. 10). By including herself instead of attacking Helmut directly Sabine upholds the politeness principle exploiting the maxim of quality (try to make your contribution one that is true) since she has made clear to Helmut that she does not really agree with Helmut's way of conducting his life.

The interaction that follows Sabine's utterance suggests a response based on irony:

HELMUT Trott?! Trott nennst du das?! Diese hageldichte Folge von gravierenden Lebensmomenten, von denen uns jeder eine ganze Traube von Entscheidungen abverlangt. (*FP* p. 12)

By echoing Sabine's utterance – 'Trott?! Trott nennst du das?!' – Helmut voices his disagreement. His choice of words that exaggerates the situation greatly, contains a degree of self-irony as it makes clear, on the one, hand his acknowledgement that their way of life lacks a certain substance and, on the other, his deliberate and conscious rejection of change. Sabine's reply is also ironic in that her communication transmits something other than what is said:

Und was für welche! Stehen wir überhaupt auf? Und wenn ja, wann? Frühstücken wir? Aber was? Ziehen wir uns an? Aber was? Gehen wir ans Wasser? Aber wo legen wir uns hin? Und wie? (*FP* p. 12)

This utterance does not express, as is often the case with irony, the opposite of what is meant: what the speaker communicates is not the utterance itself but his attitude to the contents of the utterance. Here Sabine's statement implies dissatisfaction with their totally predictable daily routine and with Helmut's refusal to establish social contact with the other couple which could have a positive influence on their own monotonous way of life.<sup>226</sup> Helmut's reply – 'Alles sehr schwer zu entscheiden' (*FP* p. 12) – indicates that he is prepared to continue the interaction in the same ironic manner: irony is an off-record strategy that, on the one hand, provides sufficient clues as to what the speaker wants to communicate while, on the other, by doing so indirectly, maintains the politeness

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<sup>226</sup> Compare my elaborations on Leech's concept of irony especially the outline of Sperber and Wilson's interpretation in section 4.1.3.1. of this thesis.

principle and avoids open conflict. Sabine is not prepared to continue in the same tone of interaction since she wants to state her case unambiguously: an actor goes on record if he wants to make it clear to participants what communicative intention leads him to do it. Here Sabine wants to indicate her firm decision to establish a relationship with the other couple:

SABINE Dein Freund Klaus...  
 HELMUT...an den ich mich nicht mehr erinnere!  
 SABINE Aber er sich um so besser an dich. (*FP* p. 12)

At this point a competitive situation develops in which assertions will lead to counter assertions and to symmetrical escalations with each defending his or her own position:

SABINE Dann hättest du die Einladung zum segeln nicht annehmen dürfen.  
 HELMUT Du hast sie angenommen.  
 SABINE Du genauso.  
 HELMUT Du hast gesagt: Wunderbar fabelhaft, segeln, oh wie schön.  
 SABINE Du hast genickt und genickt.  
 HELMUT Das stimmt nicht Sabine. Ich habe den Kopf geschüttelt. (*FP* p. 12)

These mutual accusations are bound to escalate unless other factors help to restrain the excesses that could lead to extremes of behaviour. Given the impending arrival of the other couple, it is in Sabine's interest to offer a more conciliatory approach: 'Eigentlich müßten die schon da sein' (*FP* p. 13). But her remark only draws attention to the imminence of what Helmut fears: to him the arrival of the other couple implies more than, as Sabine puts it, 'Eine harmlose Segelpartie' (*FP* p. 13), that is, a relationship that may have destructive consequences for their way of life. In the attempt to emphasize his point of view, Helmut resorts to a series of inventive idiomatic expressions that contain



metaphors, superlatives, neologisms and also bald on record strategies. In this connection I refer to Marcel Reich-Ranicky's praise of Walser's command of language and his ability to portray the speech of intellectuals. Reich-Ranicky is referring to the novella but his remarks are just as valid for the adaptation as a play: 'Selten wird in der deutschen Literatur der Gegenwart die Alltagssprache der Intellektuellen so genau und entlarvend eingefangen.'<sup>227</sup> The following strategies are illustrations of conversational implicatures where the indirect force of a remark is determined by means of an obvious violation of the maxim of quality. They are stronger than warranted in the context, as the examples below will show. This is one of the many examples loaded with metaphors:

HELMUT Widerlich, so in der Vergangenheit rumzurühren. Deckel zu, keinen Sauerstoff drankommen lassen, das fängt doch an zu gären. (*FP* p. 12)

There are also a number of neologisms or unusually assembled words with which Helmut refers derogatively to Klaus's behaviour:

Erinnerungsgejaule (*FP* p. 13)

Kriegskameradensyndrom (*FP* p. 13)

Sprudelkultur (*FP* p. 14)

Erinnerungssportler (*FP* p. 14)

To convey the urgency of his request Helmut resorts to bald on record strategies:

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<sup>227</sup> M. Reich-Ranicky, 'Martin Walser's Rückkehr zu sich selbst', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 March 1978.

HELMUT Du begreifst noch nicht was passiert ist [...] Dieser Klaus Buch ist nur der Anfang. Sie haben das Mittelmeer satt, hat sie gesagt, seine Trophäe. Sabine wir müssen weg. Sofort. Warum sind wir denn an den Bodensee, elf Jahre lang?! Weil alle, die wir nicht mehr aushalten...

SABINE ...die du nicht mehr aushälst...

HELMUT du auch, dachte ich. Weil die ans Mittelmeer gehen, sind wir hierher [...] (*FP* p. 17)

‘Seine Trophäe’ is a metaphor that in the context expresses contempt for Klaus’s making use of Hel as a showpiece, while the expressions ‘wir müssen weg’ and ‘Sofort’ are imperatives that stress their communicative urgency by not minimizing the FTA (face threatening act). The utterance also indicates that Helmut’s existential view is the result of a process that has finally led to an attitude of withdrawal from any kind of binding social contact. Since Sabine remains unmoved by Helmut’s argumentation, he resorts to metacomunication. With the following lengthy statement, Walser conveys an insight into Helmut’s psychological state of mind:

[...] Lieber Klaus, werde ich sagen, wenn der hier eintritt. [...] Lieber Klaus! Sehr freundlich von dir, uns zum Segeln einzuladen, aber, was mich angeht, ich kann nur für mich sprechen, nicht aber für Sabine, sobald jemand zu mir freundlich ist, spüre ich, daß ich nicht mehr so freundlich bin, wie ich einmal war. Ich glaube, ich scheine jetzt freundlicher, als ich bin. Manchmal tut’s mir sogar richtig leid, daß ich nicht so freundlich bin, wie ich scheine. Also, trau mir bitte, nicht. Um deinetwillen. Am besten, du gehst sofort wieder. Wir haben uns nicht getroffen. Adieu. Wenn es dir gut tut: ja ich fliehe. Wer sich mir in den Weg stellt, wird... Ich will mich nicht ausprechen. Mein Herzenswunsch ist zu verheimlichen. Diesen Wunsch habe ich mit der Mehrzahl aller heute lebenden Menschen gemeinsam. Wir verkehren miteinander wie Panzerschiffe nach nicht ganz verständlichen Regeln. Der Sinn dieser Regel liegt in ihrer Unvernünftigkeit. Je mehr ein anderer

über mich wüßte, desto mächtiger wäre er über mich. Stille. (*FP*  
pp. 17-18)<sup>228</sup>

Helmut's revelations allow a first assessment of the feelings that provide significant reasons for his attitude. Watzlawick's explanations of the nature of paradoxical behaviour are helpful for the understanding of Helmut's conduct. Watzlawick's theory of the levels of language postulates that at the lowest level statements are made about objects. This would be the realm of object language but the moment we want to say something about this language we have to use metalanguage. Applying the concept to Helmut's statement we could say that it contains two statements: one on the object level, where he is intent on conveying the impression of a friendly and obliging individual, only to deny this information on the metalevel by declaring that he is not to be trusted as in reality he is far from friendly and trustworthy, thus invalidating his original statement. Since Helmut's utterances are directed at Sabine, it is important to understand how she deals with the paradox contained in the fact that Helmut is asking her to understand that he does not want to be understood. The pragmatic import of these paradoxical relationship messages may be more obvious if we bear in mind that the statements not only convey logically meaningless content but define the relationship of the self to others. In his last utterance Helmut states that his wish not to expose himself is shared by the majority of people who in their association with others are constantly on their guard so as not to give away their real self.

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<sup>228</sup> The utterance 'ja ich fliehe. Wer sich mir in den Weg stellt, wird...' is a reference to the title. In the novella Walser describes in detail a scene where Klaus earns the admiration of all present by managing to tame a wild horse. Klaus's utterance 'Einem fliehenden Pferd kannst du dich nicht in den Weg stellen. Es muß das Gefühl haben, sein Weg bleibt frei' is confirmed by Helmut: 'Helmut stimmte Klaus überschwenglich zu. Das stimmt, rief er, und wie das stimmt.' Compare Martin Walser, *Ein fliehendes Pferd. Novelle*, pp. 88-91. Refer also to footnote 16 in section 1.

That this attitude reflects Walser's own long-term concerns becomes clear from the following notations on 6 November 1974 in his diary *Leben und Schreiben. Tagebücher 1974 - 1978*, written some years before the novella *Ein fliehendes Pferd* was published (1978) and adapted into a play (1985):

Ich schaue mich an und spreche an mir vorbei. Ich will mich nicht ansprechen. Mein größter Wunsch ist zu verheimlichen, was ich denke. Niemand soll je erfahren, was ich wirklich denke. Ich glaube, dass ich das mit der Mehrzahl aller heute lebenden Menschen gemeinsam habe. Wir verkehren miteinander wie Panzerschiffe. Nach komplizierten, keinen ganz faßbaren Regeln. Nur nicht ins Innere schauen lassen! Das ist für jeden die Regel Nr.1. Er wäre erledigt, wenn der andere alles über ihn wüsste. Je mehr der andere über mich wüsste, desto mächtiger wäre er über mich.<sup>229</sup>

That Walser's and by implication Helmut's attitude does apparently express the feelings of many is noted by Joachim Kaiser's in his review of the novella:

[...] bei dem was die Aussenwelt heute allen halbwegs Sensiblen zumutet, drängt sich die Gedanken-Nötigung an Flucht doch förmlich auf [...]. Wer träumt nicht von Berührungsverbot! Und da es keine leeren Fernen, keine Flucht-Träume mehr gibt, bleibt bloß der Weg nach (und die bewaffnete Festigung des) Innen.<sup>230</sup>

The above suggests that Helmut's behaviour should not be judged as a retreat into an ivory tower but as a concern he shares with his contemporaries in a world beyond the text. Taking this further, one could argue that the reason for his reserved attitude, apart from his personality structure, may also reside in the interdependent nature of communication. In Watzlawick's words: 'It is as if they

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<sup>229</sup> Compare Martin Walser, *Leben und Schreiben: Tagebücher 1974-1978* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2010), pp. 41-42. Previous to this Walser's *Tagebücher 1951-1962* and *1963-1973* were published in 2005 and 2007 respectively. The last one entitled *Schreiben und Leben* was recently published September 2014.

<sup>230</sup> J. Kaiser, 'Martin Walser's Blindes Glanzstück: Funktion und Funktionieren der Novelle "Ein fliehendes Pferd"', *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken*, 32, vol. 363 (1978), pp. 828-38.

[the interactants] were saying “Trust would make me vulnerable” thus the inherent prediction is “The other will take advantage of me”.<sup>231</sup> From the point of view of pragmatics it cannot be denied that principles bring values such as truthfulness into the study of communication and the requirement to tell the truth might be regarded as a moral imperative, something that might seem to go beyond the immediate concerns or, indeed, the explanatory powers of pragmatics. However, the aim of including the communicative resonances of such principles in a scientific account of language is descriptive rather than prescriptive and as long as the values considered are the ones assumed on empirical grounds to be operative in society, there is no reason to exclude them from the study by pragmatics.<sup>232</sup> Although the literary critic must remain aware of the inherent limitations of pragmatic frameworks when it comes to analysing literary works, it is clear the maxims here, as they relate to the truth-value of a statement, form a necessary part of pragmatic meaning in that they contribute to explaining that speakers mean more than what they say.

Sabine’s reaction to Helmut’s discourse runs contrary to his expectations: she wilfully ignores Helmut’s plea for support as her statement shows: ‘*prüft die Sprudelvorräte*: Hoffentlich mögen die Überkinger’ (*FP* p. 18). Leech’s sympathy maxim, which will be applied here, states that speakers maximize the expression of sympathy in talk unless they have good reason not to. The audience may want to look for an explanation as to why Sabine rejects Helmut’s plea for sympathy and requests of him instead that he engage in an action that will benefit her, that is, to make the expected visitors welcome. Does her lack of concern suggest some

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<sup>231</sup> Watzlawick et al., p. 228.

<sup>232</sup> See G. Leech, p. 248.

sort of mutual isolation from each other or is she intent on drawing Helmut out of his position of social seclusion to the benefit of them both? It is clear that Sabine goes out of her way to flout the sympathy maxim in order to ignore Helmut's urgent requests since her own objective runs contrary to his.

Helmut's desperation to avoid what is now imminent leads him to suggest a gross breach of Grice's quality principle:

Wir ziehen die Vorhänge zu. Frau Zürn soll sagen, die Halms haben plötzlich weg müssen. Dein Bruder hat uns abgeholt. Deinem Vater geht es nicht gut...Er will die Vorhänge zuziehen.  
(FP p. 19)

Sabine's blunt bald on record strategy – 'Hör auf!' (FP p. 19) – categorically rejects Helmut's desperate attempts to reverse the situation. Audiences are also likely to interpret interactions between characters in the light of the information supplied by the stage directions (whether they read them or see them realized on stage) and Helmut is next seen to adopt the same attitude of resignation on which the play opens: '*Er ist wieder im Sessel*' (FP p. 19). While the audiences/readers are aware of Sabine's and Helmut's conflicting attitudes the author stops short of allowing the full implicature of their behaviour to be revealed. Viewed through the Gricean framework, enough information is given on the author/reader level to set in motion a process of reasoning but not sufficient to conclude what lies behind Helmut's attitude which verges on the pathological, given that he goes as far as to feign illness to avoid meeting the Buchs: 'Ich habe Kopfwegh. Es ist so heiß. So schwül. Sabine. Ich kann nicht' (FP p. 13). Here Helmut wants to convince himself and Sabine that he will be free from being censured for his

failure to meet the Buchs since he is at the mercy of forces beyond his control. To Watzlawick, however, this is proof of a psychoneurotic symptom.<sup>233</sup>

Up to this point the text has revealed that Helmut's existential approach is the result of a long and carefully rehearsed process that has lead him to withdraw from social contact outside of his professional life. While it might be understandable, on the one hand, that Helmut sees in the apparently overwhelming presence of the Buchs an intrusion into his privacy, the reader will ask himself or herself why he resorts to such extreme strategies to avoid any kind of social contact with the other couple. Does he fear that the Buchs will put at risk the position of detachment which he has worked out for himself – 'die allgemeine Fühllosigkeit, die sich Helmut so schwer erarbeitet hatte' –<sup>234</sup> which may turn out to be a façade he presents to those around him? Is he really not immune to Hel's physical attraction ('SABINE Geradezu abgegrast hast du sie mit deinen Blicken', *FP* p. 10) and is he afraid to be reminded of their mutual past which Klaus insists on recalling?

As the imminent arrival of the Buchs approaches, the audience has been able to interpret the clues given via Helmut's and Sabine's attitudes to reach a hypothesis that runs along the following lines. Their meeting with the Buchs on the promenade provokes contrasting positions which each tries to defend with his or her own strategies. To Sabine the presence of the Buchs is a welcome disruption of a monotonous and uneventful routine. In contrast, Helmut sees the other couple as a threat to the attitude of withdrawal he has worked out for himself and in which he wants Sabine to play a part. While the interaction

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., section 3.234. *The Symptom as Communication*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>234</sup> See B. Henrichs 'Narziss wird fünfzig. Martin Walser's Novelle "Ein fliehendes Pferd"', *Die Zeit*, 24 February 1978.

indicates that Helmut is ready to discourage any intrusion into his privacy, he considers the existence of the Buchs particularly disturbing and intrusive since Klaus, on the one hand, is determined to remind him of a mutual past which he has long decided to conceal and, on the other, presents him with a young and sexually attractive wife who arouses desires he hoped he had long overcome.

#### **5.2.4 Helmut and Klaus: Assertion versus Evasiveness**

The dialogue between Helmut and Sabine has given audience/readers a first insight into the formation of the characters and into the expectations that Helmut and Sabine associate with the other couple. In the following the interaction of the actors and their reactions to each other will be analysed. As has been mentioned before, Leech proposed that interactants always start with assumptions concerning a number of more affective maxims (tact, generosity, modesty, sympathy, agreement, approbation) that deal with polite behaviour. As has also been mentioned, that audiences are likely to interpret interactions between characters in light of the information presented in the stage directions. Thus Klaus's initial appearance reveals disregard for the tact maxime (minimize cost and maximize benefit to others): *'Es klopft [...]. Ohne ein Herein abzuwarten, kommt Klaus herein, hinter ihm Hel'* (FP p. 19). A more indirect approach – if Klaus had waited to be invited in – would have given the Halms an option. The degree of indirectness with which an action is performed correlates with the degree to which the hearer is allowed the option of not falling in line with the speaker and Klaus's entrance does not allow such a choice since he conveys the intention to impose his own punctuation on the sequence of events. The instructions *'hinter ihm Hel'* are also a first indication that Hel plays a subordinate role to Klaus. The following



accompanying statement that uses metaphorical substitutions to describe the landscape prompts further speculations on the role he is intent on playing:

Sowas von einem impotenten Sack! Dieser See. Am Morgen so ein halbes Lüftchen, aus. Mehr kann er nicht pro Tag. Wir sind praktisch hergerudert. Durch eine Landschaft aus lauter schwülen Lappen. Alles hängt, hängt, hängt. (*FP* p. 20)

Metaphors are literally false and therefore quality violations: whereas some are euphemistic, much verbal abuse results from metaphorical substitutions, particularly when the speaker's intention is to belittle and to degrade as in Klaus's derogatory description of the landscape with its revealing sexual implications.

While at this point an overt explanation is withheld, the interlocutor can reasonably assume from Klaus's attitude that his flouting of the tact maxim and his choice of metaphors denote exaggerated signs of self-confidence and egotism. Another explanation, one that would confirm the information gathered from Helmut's and Sabine's former interaction, is that Klaus exploits the politeness strategies in order to assert his claim to the relationship between himself and Helmut. The interaction that follows confirms Klaus's intention to work on the assumption that the close relationship of his and Helmut's school and student days remains unchanged. The interactional effect of such behaviour can be explained with Brown and Levinson's concept of sociological variables and its derivatives of social distance (D) and rating of imposition (R). Klaus takes advantage of his and Helmut's mutual knowledge of past experiences to define the social distance between them by acting as though the degree of intimacy is greater than Helmut is prepared to admit. From the very beginning of his and Hel's appearance on the scene, he tries to bridge this gap by proposing to eliminate the formal 'Sie' between them:

Sie! Mensch, Sabine! Wenn wir auf meinem Boot wären, wurde ich das sofortige Du befehlen. Helmut, hier befehlst du. Befiehl uns das Du! (*FP* p. 21)

By trying to rerank the social distance Klaus also redefines the rating of imposition through assertions of intimacy which in reality are offensive to Helmut. An extract from one of Klaus's lengthy solo speeches that abound in the play, should explain how he tries to assert his position:

[...] Allerdings, wo jetzt die Schülerinnen immer geiler werden, das kann schon auch ein challenge sein, was? Wie viele Schülerinnen hast du schon gebumst, Helmut? Sabine, es ist immer besser man weiß Bescheid. Sobald er's beichtet, ist doch alles gut. Also Helmut, komm, nicht so verklemmt. Ein bisschen mehr zwanzigstes Jahrhundert, bitte. [...] (*FP* p. 23)

If Klaus is successful and is able to rerank the values of social distance and the rating of imposition in his favour, the interaction may take a direction where he has the upper hand. Klaus flouts the maxim of approbation by denigrating Helmut's profession, on the one hand, while, on the other, he exploits banter to bridge the social distance between himself and the Halms. A lack of social distance correlates with a low position on the scale of politeness and Klaus hides behind banter to flout the tact maxim, a strategy he will repeatedly resort to during the development of the interaction.

Klaus is eager to recall past memories and makes use of a number of strategies to deconstruct Helmut's attempt to protect his privacy. He forces Helmut into reviving a scene at the market square where Helmut ordered Klaus to undress and bathe in a well in front of an attractive female student. He coaxes Helmut into reacting by posing an assertive question: 'Helmut, du warst hinter der

genau so her wie ich, tu nicht, als sähst du die nicht noch genau vor dir? (*FP* p. 28). Leech distinguishes this kind of question from an ordinary one in that it exists in the speaker's or the hearer's mind as an assumption to which the speaker expects a 'yes'.<sup>235</sup> Klaus tricks Helmut into giving in and acknowledging his reminiscences by forcing him to participate – 'HELMUT Sie war aus Worms' (*FP* p. 29).

Helmut will hate himself and Klaus for his weakness, for Klaus is not willing to stop there as he is now determined to further digress into the past, regardless of flouting the tact maxim, by embarrassing Helmut, as the following example will show:

In Rolf Eberles Keller. Wir waren alle ganz schön am Reiben. Es war ja dunkel. Licht durften wir nicht machen, sprechen auch nicht. Also alle tief drin im pursuit of happiness, wir glaubten, wir hätten alle schon unsere schmerzhaft schöne Lust im Betrieb, da hörten wir plötzlich Helmut's Stimme ganz ganz leise sagen: jetzt bin ich ans Pure kommen. *Er lacht, die Frauen mit.* (*FP* p. 35)

Helmut will resist Klaus's incursions into the past by disqualifying his communications, that is, he reacts in a way that invalidates Klaus's utterance:

HELMUT Kompliment, Klaus! Du siehst, Sabine glaubt schon was Du erzählst sei tatsächlich passiert.  
KLAUS Ist es nicht?  
HELMUT Spielt das wirklich eine Rolle? (*FP* p. 36)

Memory is liable to suffer from distortion and its recollection is subjective and inseparably linked to the ongoing relationship: Helmut tries to minimize the impact of Klaus's statement by undermining his power and authority, denying the

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<sup>235</sup> Compare G. Leech, p. 167.

factual accuracy of his recollection. It is clear to the reader/viewer that Klaus's embarrassing contravention of the maxim of tact maximizes the cost to Helmut, as noted by Joachim Kaiser in his review of the novella:

Der Penis plus Anomalie und 'Purem' wird beschrieben. Wir ekeln uns ein wenig und tun es mit ausdrücklicher Genehmigung, denn Helmut windet sich dabei ja auch vor Verlegenheit. Streitet ab.<sup>236</sup>

The unabashed manner in which Klaus speaks of his own sexual activities and those of others, shows an exaggerated exhibitionistic need to dominate the scene, as the following example will illustrate:

[...] Ich will doch nicht den tollen body spielen. Meine erste Frau hab ich am Schluß nur noch einmal pro Woche gebumst so was von herunter war ich. Ich bin überzeugt, Sabine, daß Helmut mit dir eine schöne bizarre Bumskultur entwickelt hat. Aber dann seid ihr entglitten, entschlafen. [...]. (*FP* p. 38)

The reader/viewer may find in Klaus's behaviour indications that his bald on record strategy which (at least metaphorically) overrides any face concerns, responds to the need to boost his own image. Does Klaus's excessive use of hyperboli and metaphors become questionable? Overstatements when used frequently lose their interest value and become predictable, with the addressee adjusting his interpretation accordingly. Does Klaus's excessive tendency to impress not cover up feelings of insecurity and is the display of eroticism between himself and Hel, coupled with repeated demands for confirmation on his part, not a visible sign of his vulnerability? It seems useful to evoke my own observation in section 3.1. 'The Pragmatic Approach' concerning the understanding of

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<sup>236</sup> Joachim Kaiser 'Martin Walser's blindes Glanzstück'. Compare Martin Walser *Ein fliehendes Pferd* p. 52.

pragmatics as ‘...also the study of action in language undertaken with the intention of causing the addressee to reassess his view of how things are, including his system of values and his view of the speaker’s beliefs and intentions’. Pragmatics allows for a range of interpretations and what I have read here as a sign of Klaus’s vulnerability could alternatively be understood as an expression of irony. This would suggest that Klaus’s language use is more self-conscious, and his views perhaps more enlightened, than my alternative interpretation allows for.<sup>237</sup> The following examples show how on repeated occasions Klaus resorts to what appears to be a ritual between himself and Hel in order to regain confirmation:

Du magst mich nicht mehr, ja?! *Hält das Gesicht hin, sie küssen einander.* [...] (FP p. 24)

Du magst mich nicht mehr, gell? *Er holt sich einen Kuß, den Hel launisch gibt.* (FP p. 29)

Ich glaube, du magst mich doch noch ein bißchen. *Er küßt sie unbekümmert.* (FP p. 31)

Oder magst du mich nicht mehr? HEL *küßt ihn.* (FP p. 32)

Du magst mich nicht mehr, gell? *Sie küssen sich heftig.* (FP p. 33)

Ritualization becomes a process inasmuch as vocal sounds and movements acquire a specialized communicative role in people’s behaviour. They appear to be an active part of Hel’s and Klaus’s relationship in the form of an, albeit unconscious, demand to Hel for support. Watzlawick sees rituals as analogical communication, i.e. their meaning goes beyond what is actually said. In

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<sup>237</sup> On irony as a pragmatic category and Walser’s account of the literary concept see section 5.2.5.

Watzlawick's view analogical communication comprises posture, gesture, facial expression and any other nonverbal manifestation of which the organism is capable. Hel's attitude signals familiarity with Klaus's strategy although her involuntary gestures – '*Hält ihm das Gesicht hin*' or '*Er holt sich einen Kuß, den Hel launisch gibt*' – indicate that she does not fully approve of his ostentatious display of eroticism. Although at times reluctant, Hel complies with the complimentary role into which Klaus has forced her, as can be seen from Klaus's constant demands for confirmation of his erotic and physical achievements:

HEL     *küßt ihn*. Er redet ein bisschen viel darüber. Das ist aber sein einziger Fehler.  
 KLAUS Heißt das, sonst bin ich ganz gut?  
 HEL     *lacht*. Es geht.  
 KLAUS Das gibst du zu?  
 HEL     *lacht und küßt ihn*. Ja, das gebe ich zu.  
 KLAUS Du bist achtzehn Jahre jünger als ich. Hast du zu klagen?  
 HEL     Will ihm den Mund zuhalten.  
 KLAUS Ich meine das Ernst.  
 HEL     Ich auch. (*FP* pp.32-33)

It has been stated that principles and maxims are regulative rather than constitutive: it is therefore admissible that they conflict with one another. The above quoted interaction between Hel and Klaus indicates that although she gives in to Klaus's demand, she implies disagreement with his behaviour. Hel flouts the maxim of manner, be perspicuous, and one of its maxims, avoid ambiguity.

The following excerpt on the other hand, leaves no doubt that Hel unreservedly follows Klaus's demands to force herself erotically on Helmut, to incite him to give up his avoidance strategies:

[...] Wir dürfen nicht nachgeben. Hel, bitte, hier steht ein Leben auf dem Spiel! Allein fängt sich der nicht mehr, [...] Er muß wissen, daß wir uns ihm in den Weg werfen. [...] Hel, du kannst es, nur du.

Ich weiß das. Du hast es in jedem Finger, in jedem Haar. Wenn du ihn berührst...Elektrisiert ihn... [...] Zeig ihm wovon er wegläuft. Komm, los, jetzt, jetzt, jetzt...Aktion! Ja, Jawohl!

*Hel hat sich Helmut auf den Schoß gesetzt, jetzt küßt sie ihn seriös und nicht bloß flüchtig. Er springt auf, dabei stößt er sie so von sich, daß sie fällt. Er hilft ihr auf. Sie bleibt einen Augenblick ganz nah bei ihm stehen, ihren Kopf an seine Schulter gelehnt. [...]* (FP pp. 42-43)

What may appear as verbal and also nonverbal confrontations between Helmut and the Buchs have implications on the level of discourse between the playwright and the readers and audiences. It has become clear that the Buchs seem to enjoy having found someone to show off and boast to about their erotic and physical attributes. Sabine, fascinated if also overwhelmed, approves of their behaviour and encourages Hel's advances, ignoring Helmut's desperate plea for support:

HEL Tut's gut?  
HELMUT Sabine!! Bitte!!  
SABINE Ob's gut tut, Helmut?! (FP p. 39)

In spite of Helmut's resistance to what he considers an intrusion into his and Sabine's lives, the Buchs exert a certain attraction not only on Sabine but also on Helmut himself. Whenever they show off their erotic achievements, the Halms try to conceal that they are disturbed by concentrating on their drinks, as in the following examples: '[...] *Helmut und Sabine trinken Wein. Helmut trinkt ziemlich heftig.*' [...] (FP p. 29) or '[...] *Helmut und Sabine trinken*' (FP p. 33). Their attitude could be an off-record indication suggesting that the Halms are not only embarrassed but also eroticised. Sabine, as the text has indicated, even if she is slightly disturbed by the Buch's behaviour, responds positively to their advances,

Helmut, in contrast, reacts to Klaus's aggressive recalling of mutual experiences with a series of defense mechanisms that are only partly successful. He resists Klaus's advances by means of a technique of disqualification that invalidates his own and Klaus's communications by questioning both their powers of recollection as in the following examples:

Wir glauben dir auch so, daß dein Gedächtnis noch jugendlich frisch ist. Mich darfst du nicht fragen. Ich weiß nichts mehr. Hinter mir ist Friedhof. (*FP* p. 28)

Klaus's recollections are also dismissed as 'Kinder- und Hausmärchen' (*FP* p. 34) and 'Infantilcreationen' (*FP* p. 37). Klaus will have become aware that Helmut is determined to avoid any commitment inherent in communications on mutual past experiences, but takes little notice of his objections. Helmut could declare more or less bluntly that he is not interested in pursuing the subject but by the rules of good behaviour this is reproachable and it would probably not deter Klaus from his purpose. He will have to continue searching for defensive strategies to protect himself against Klaus's incursions into the past, as when he recalls Helmut's devotion to the writings of Nietzsche:

KLAUS    Der hatte Formulierungen drauf, Hel, wahnsinnig. Mit vierzehn Zarathustra gelesen, im Leuze. Aber ja, Helmut, tu nicht, als hättest du das vergessen, [...] er hieß bei uns nur der Leuze Nietzsche [...]  
HELMUT   Sabine, frag ihn von wem er redet (*FP* p. 27)

To elude self-exposure Helmut tries to distract attention from himself by avoiding direct communication with Klaus and appealing to Sabine for protection, something which Sabine pretends not to hear, leaving the field to Klaus to keep on



recalling past experiences. Hinton Thomas finds parallels between Helmut's current attitude and the refusal to be reminded of his devotion to Nietzsche's work. In Nietzsche's view a failure to live and take risks would have been a failure to realize human potential and Helmut is unwilling to expose himself to new experiences. Nietzsche's writings, observes Hinton Thomas

[...] represent in their affirmation of 'Leben' the side of Halm which he has long accustomed himself to suppress. Also, both in their different ways – the one by his return into Halm's life, the other by his part in a youthful past that his reappearance revives – come dangerously near, as far as Halm is concerned to getting at the man behind the mask.<sup>238</sup>

The more Helmut tries to evade Klaus's excursions into the past, the more Klaus accosts him with new incidences from their boyhood as in the following example of their interaction:

- KLAUS [...] Helmut, jetzt sag mir bloß, wie hat der Physikpauker immer gerufen im Parterre?  
 HELMUT Welcher Physikpauker?  
 KLAUS Mensch, Helmut, der immer gebrüllt hat: das Untergeschoß gehört mir oder so ähnlich. Ich brauche den Satz. Wenn du nicht ganz genau den Satz hast, hast du gar nichts. Ein Wort an der falschen Stelle und der Satz ist taub, tot. Sobald du das Wort an die richtige Stelle kriegst, 'Sesam öffne dich', der Pauker steht da, brüllt, du stehst da, alles klar. Jetzt hilf mir doch, Helmut. Bitte  
 HEL Jetzt hilf ihm doch. Bitte [...]  
 HELMUT *Automatisch*: Der ganze untere Stock gehört der Physik. (FP pp. 40-41)

Again, Helmut will not be pleased with himself for giving in as Klaus is now determined to enjoy his success over Helmut's reluctance to share past

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<sup>238</sup> R. Hinton Thomas, 'Martin Walser. The Nietzsche Connection', *German Life and Letters*, 35.4 (1982), pp. 319-28.

experiences:

KLAUS *brüllt*: Ja. Er springt auf. Ja. Der ganze untere Stock gehört der Physik. Schlägt Helmut auf die Schulter. Das war er. Der ganze untere Stock gehört der Physik. Mensch Helmut. (*FP* p. 41)

Klaus's speech behaviour is exhibitionistic and ruthless and forces the other characters into spectator-roles. Yet, readers and audiences will ask themselves what is implied by his obsession with reviving the past and why he besieges Helmut with his demands to recall exact wordings that were part of their mutual experiences. Readers familiar with Walser's other works may find parallels in his novella *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* where Alfred Dorn, the auctorial narrator, draws on the power of language to hold on to the past: 'Er wollte was gewesen war retten. Ein Wort zu viel oder zu wenig und so ein Satz war ihm nichts mehr wert'.<sup>239</sup> Alfred Dorn's scrupulous reconstruction of the past and his contempt for the present serve to conceal that he did not become what he wanted to be and what was expected of him. Could Walser's off record message to the reader/viewer imply that Klaus is not what he appears to be and that his over-confident speech behaviour conceals insecurity? Is Klaus's insistence on reconstructing the past masking a sense of failure in the present and is he hoping for Helmut's support to regain confidence for a new beginning? At this point the reader/viewer can only speculate since Klaus's and Helmut's diametrically opposed verbal discourses, the one's egotistic, self-assertive against the other's evasive, impersonal speech behaviour, are far from giving away the slightest bit of their real selves. In the review of the novella that inspired the play, H. L.

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<sup>239</sup> See Martin Walser, *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 13.

Arnold defines the reason Helmut and Klaus are unable to come nearer to each other:

[...] weil ein jeder die Oberfläche des anderen, sein gebotenes Bildnis, für wahr nimmt und weil er dieses als Infragestellen eines eigenen verborgenen Inneren annimmt.<sup>240</sup>

Both Helmut and Klaus repeatedly use irony to protect their own position: Helmut to ward off Klaus's intrusion into his life, Klaus to imply criticism of Helmut's bourgeois existence. Since the use of irony is significant to the understanding of the interaction in the play, it will in the following be treated under a separate heading.

### 5.2.5 Irony

The use of irony is defined as an expression of uncooperative behaviour that disregards the CP, in particular the maxim of quality (do not say what you believe to be false). The essence of this idiomatic device signifies roughly that the contrary from what is expressed is meant but, as explained under section 4.1.3.1, this definition has to be extended since irony not only conveys propositions that can be accounted for in terms of meaning and implicature but also vaguer suggestions of images and attitudes which occasionally, but not always, convey the opposite of what is meant. It is obvious that the speaker transmits something other than what is said and often it is not the utterance itself but an attitude to the contents of the utterance. With these definitions in mind I will try to analyse the effect of irony on the interaction in the play.

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<sup>240</sup> H.L. Arnold, 'Die Verstörung von Urlaubsgefühlen. Der Autor ist souveräner geworden', *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 13 December 1978.

Walser's own engagement with the study of irony has also influenced its use here. The series of lectures held at the University of Frankfurt, brought together later in his book *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie, Frankfurter Vorlesungen* are significant to the treatment of irony in the novella and its subsequent adaptation as a play.<sup>241</sup> A detailed account of the work would not be in line with the purpose of this analysis but some background explanations of Walser's theoretical reflections will add to the understanding of his use of irony in the interaction. In an interview with Heinrich von Nussbaum, Walser contends that of all literary subjects irony is to him 'der theoretisch interessanteste' and that he found no other 'literarische Technik, über die so viel Widerspruch, einander krass entgegengesetztes [...] geschrieben und gedacht wurde'.<sup>242</sup> Walser juxtaposes Thomas Mann's 'großbürgerliche Kunstfiguren' who adopt ironic attitudes to justify their 'Recht auf Nichtanteilnahme' to Robert Walser's work *Jakob von Gunten*. Here the protagonist practices 'kleinbürgerliches Sozialverhalten' by embarking on a strategy of 'unersättliche Zustimmung' to the prevailing conditions.<sup>243</sup> This kind of irony, Walser affirms, 'würde das Bestehende auch lieber beschimpfen, aber nein sie ist bis ins innere vom Geltenden so sehr beherrscht, daß sie versuchen muß, das Loblied des jetzt Geltenden zu singen'.<sup>244</sup> As I understand Walser, he suggests that the ability to submit one's ego to the prevailing circumstances allows the individual to preserve his own identity. I would see Helmut's attitude as a way to secure for himself a role that would fit the demands of society without

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<sup>241</sup> See Martin Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie, Frankfurter Vorlesungen*.

<sup>242</sup> Heinrich von Nussbaum, 'Ermittlung über Ironie. Martin Walsers Vorlesungen in der Frankfurter Uni zuhörend und ihm Fragen stellend', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 15 November 1980.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> See Martin Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Edition Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 195. In his reflections on *Jakob von Gunten* Walser refers to Robert Walser, *Das Gesamtwerk*, ed. Jochen Greven (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1978) vol. VI.

compromising his inner freedom by using his understanding of the nature of ‘Kleinbürgertum’ to his advantage.<sup>245</sup> This is suggested by the fact that he appears to have consciously developed an attitude of conformity as a way to preserve this freedom, as indicated in following example:

KLAUS Helmut, was ist aus dir geworden  
 HELMUT Ein Kleinbürger  
 KLAUS *lacht unbändig*: Daran sehe ich, daß du noch der alte bist. Immer so bizarre wie möglich. Ein Kleinbürger, sehr gut!  
 HELMUT Du täuschst dich, ich meine, was ich sage. Ich bin ein Kleinbürger und möchte nichts anderes sein. Wem das nicht recht ist, der...  
*Er zuckt mit den Schultern und trinkt. (FP p. 24)*

The last statement, ‘Wem das nicht recht ist, der...’ with the accompanying body language indicates that Helmut is determined to resist any outside attempt at trying to come closer to his inner self. (See Helmut’s solo speech directed at Sabine on p. 180.)<sup>246</sup> It also implies that there is irony in Helmut’s use of the term ‘Kleinbürger’ which broadly implies a petit bourgeois and conformist way of life, but is also a way of concealing his real personality that he understands as something ‘better’ than ‘kleinbürgerlich’.<sup>247</sup> I would try to place this strategy into Sperber and Wilson’s understanding of irony (see my observations in section 4.1.3.1 pp. 28-31) which allows for it not necessarily meaning the opposite of what is said but also possibly expressing an attitude towards the content of a statement.

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<sup>245</sup> That Walser might be touching here on a common theme of the period is suggested by the example of a film directed by Krzysztof Zanussi, *The Structure of Crystals* (1969). Here a gifted physicist consciously withdraws to a provincial and modest life which is financially constrained in order to be able to live his life more fully. The film involves a dialogue between him and a friend sent to try to persuade him to come home back to the glamour of international scientific work.

<sup>246</sup> See my explanation in section 5.2.4.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

In the novella on which the play and its characters are based, Helmut's endeavours towards successfully hiding his real self are enforced through the following narratorial comment: 'Im Urlaub probierte er Gesichter und Benehmensweisen aus, die ihm geeignet zu sein schienen, seine wirkliche Person in Sicherheit zu bringen vor den Augen der Welt' and 'was dabei zustande kam, hatte mit ihm angenehm wenig zu tun'.<sup>248</sup> In the play Helmut strives for the same effect by either withholding his reaction or agreeing with short monosyllabic replies to Klaus's constant flow of words that constitute a dominant feature of the interaction and which he only interrupts to seek Helmut's or also the other character's confirmation. These utterances often imply criticism of Helmut, as can be detected in the following examples:

KLAUS [...] Wir hätten uns schon vor drei Jahren treffen können. Wie findest du das?! Das ist doch wirklich lustig, oder?!  
 HELMUT Ja, sehr lustig (*FP* p. 20)  
 KLAUS Ihr seid mir so zwei  
 HELMUT Das stimmt (*FP* p. 31)  
 KLAUS [...] Du bist ein fanatischer Arbeitsmensch geworden, stimmt's?!  
 HELMUT Stimmt. (*FP* p. 32)

From a pragmatic point of view Helmut's short affirmative responses are violations of the quality principle since he is eager to conceal his real thoughts and feelings to avoid self-exposure. Helmut's apparent agreement is ironic as irony here conveys the ironist's distance to the content of a conversation with the receiver being unable to recognize that he is ironically addressed. Klaus's use of irony is less subtle and more direct than Helmut's. The reader/viewer will ask himself, though, if Klaus bypasses Helmut's utterances in such a way as to allow

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<sup>248</sup> Compare Martin Walser's novella *Ein fliehendes Pferd* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 13 and 15 respectively.

him to follow his own purpose and his line of self-promotion which involves a diminishing of Helmut. His use of irony constitutes an – albeit indirect – attack on Helmut's way of life as in the following example:

[...] Alkohol kann ich mir nicht leisten. Ich bin ja kein Beamter geworden. Ich muß fit sein. Zum Beamten hätte ich nicht die Seelenstärke gehabt. Ich wäre einfach verkommen. Ein spiesig verwittertes Harnsäurekonzentrat wär ich geworden. Ich brauche die Herausforderung. Die Wildbahn. The daily challenge. [...] (*FP* p. 23)

Klaus transmits something other than what is said and it is clear that this is a scathing assault on Helmut's life style and at the same time a justification of his own way of life. The above is one of the many examples in which Klaus's comments are perceived as ironic, unflattering allusions to Helmut. The use of metaphors like 'Pubertät mit Dornenkrone, das war sein Trick' (*FP* p. 27) and 'Nur Leute bei denen es erotisch nicht stimmt, brauchen Arbeit' (*FP* p. 32) are veiled criticisms towards Helmut's lack of eroticism.

Irony, as has been seen from the above examples, provides an indirect method of being offensive to others but may also have a positive function in permitting aggression to manifest itself in a less dangerous form than by direct criticism, insults or threats. On the writer/reader level it can be argued that Klaus's and Helmut's use of irony, the one to promote his own ego at the cost of the other's self-confidence, the other because he is unwilling to expose himself, does not make it easy for the reader to decide between right and wrong, truth and lies, deception or self-deception.

### 5.2.6 The Dénouement

The reader/viewer may not be in a position to decide between right and wrong motivations but at this stage of Helmut's and Klaus's interaction – they are alone in the room, preparing to go sailing – he will be inclined to sympathize with the defensive strategy with which Helmut tries to avoid Klaus's lengthy and invasive verbal attack. Klaus's suggestions, which border on demands, are bald on record strategies without redressive devices which makes it difficult for Helmut to deal with them. He incites Helmut to give up his life style and go with him and Hel to the Bahamas – 'Komm mit mir auf die Bahamas [...] (*FP* p. 45), 'Du mußt gerettet werden' (*FP* p. 46) and

Vielleicht hast du schon resigniert. Ich glaube das nicht. Ich glaube eher, du spielst dir diese Resignation vor. Wenn es aber einmal Ernst wird, wirst du schreiend zu fliehen versuchen. Zu spät [...] (*FP* p. 47)

Klaus also flouts some of the affective maxims as proposed by Leech, that deal with polite behaviour (see section 4.1.7), here the tact maxim:

Sabine ist eine echt brutale Frau. Ich sehe ganz klar, daß du das nicht mehr merkst. Das ist das Problem. Sie bringt es nicht mehr. Für dich [...] (*FP* p. 44)

As has been his strategy all along, he exploits the rating of imposition through assertions of intimacy which in reality are offensive to Helmut. Klaus also flouts the strategy of modesty by emphasizing his own qualities as in the following example:

Ich möchte brilliant bleiben, verstehst du, glänzend, großartig, [...] Ich bin ein Anbeter meiner selbst. Hel betet mich in gewisser Weise auch an [...]. (*FP* p. 45)



What appears to be a lengthy monologue escalates to the point of delusion, as Klaus ignores Helmut's one attempt at formulating a reaction – 'Ich weiß nicht, ob du das richtig siehst. Sabine und ich sind, so wie wir sind, durchaus, wie soll ich sagen...' (FP p. 46).

On the writer/reader level, the reader is at this stage only able to make assumptions about Klaus's bold, aggressive display of strategies against Helmut's passive behaviour. By allowing his character to flout Grice's principles of quantity (make your contribution as informative as required) and manner (avoid ambiguity), the writer allows the reader to ask whether Buch's speech behaviour, his use of strategies, is an appeal for or an offer of help – 'Mach du von mir Gebrauch, dann mach ich von dir Gebrauch' (FP p. 47) – and if his exaggerated self-promotion does not actually imply a demand for Helmut to accept a complimentary relationship with Klaus, similar to his and Hel's relationship. This would be a form of rigid complimentary relationship where Klaus has the upper hand and imposes the tone for the interaction. The answer to these questions will be elucidated partly by the following analyses of Hel's explanations.

#### **5.2.6.1 Apparent Forms of Communication in Conflict with Reality: Paradoxical Communication between Klaus and Hel**

The stage instructions indicate that Klaus and Helmut have gone sailing in spite of bad weather warnings – '*Draußen sieht man jetzt den Widerschein der Sturmwarnung, 2. Stufe* (FP p. 43) and '*Der Sturm hat inzwischen zugenommen*' (FP p. 48). Sabine and Hel have been waiting several hours for their return – '*Sie warten schon ein paar Stunden. Der Sturm ist vorbei*' (FP p. 53). Sabine who had encouraged the idea of Klaus and Helmut going sailing is greatly alarmed and full of self-reproaches: ' [...] Ich hätte ihn nicht mit Klaus allein lassen dürfen. Das

kann nicht gut gehen, diese zwei...' (FP p. 54). While Sabine expresses her fears, Hel's off-record strategy implies unconcern, a certain relief at being able to indulge in what she is banned from doing in Klaus's presence and also criticism of Klaus: '*Hel raucht. HEL Seit sechs Jahren...die erste Zigarette. Klaus hat es mir... abgewöhnt [...]*' (FP p. 53), '*Sie trinkt mit Genuß*' (FP p. 55).

After Helmut's safe return, albeit without Klaus whose whereabouts are uncertain, Hel who as the stage instructions show has consumed large quantities of alcohol – '*Hel trinkt ihren Calvados aus. [...] Helmut schenkt ihr wieder ein. Sie trinkt*' (FP p. 63), Sabine '*[...] sieht, daß Hels Glas leer ist, füllt es, Hel trinkt*' (FP p. 64) – feels encouraged to lay open her relationship to Klaus, which in the following I will attempt to analyse in the light of Watzlawick's Double Bind theory.<sup>249</sup>

It is clear from Hel's explanation that she plays a strong complementary role to Klaus:

Ich selber habe praktisch...Wenn ich das ein einziges Mal sagen dürfte...Ich habe nicht leben dürfen. Das hat er nicht gestattet. Ich habe mich für das was er gemacht hat, mehr interessieren müssen als er selber. (FP p. 67)

Paradoxically, Klaus was, on the one hand, 'sauer, wenn jemand etwas gelobt hat was ich gemacht habe', on the other, 'Was er nicht erreicht hatte, sollte ich, sein Stolz' (FP p. 67). For the relationship to survive, Hel had to adapt to Klaus's distortion of reality. On the one hand, Klaus wants to convey the impression that he enjoys his work, 'Was er mache, mache er nur aus Freude an der Sache', on the

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<sup>249</sup> See my elaborations on Watzlawick's double bind theory in section 4.3.1.1. of this thesis. Compare also Watzlawick et al., pp. 212-19

other, he is unable to withstand either the pressures or the demands of his existence: 'Ihm ist alles, was er getan hat, furchtbar schwer gefallen [...] Klaus war fertig. Fix und...' (*FP* p. 66). He felt that '[...] alles, was er tut, Schwindel sei' (*FP* p. 65), 'Er ist sich vorgekommen wie der letzte Dreck' (*FP* p. 67). Since the message itself is paradoxical, the partner is more or less prohibited from showing any awareness of the contradiction involved. Hel had to convince him 'daß er nicht der letzte Dreck ist. Glaubhaft, aber ja' (*FP* p. 67). Klaus's behaviour forces her into a dual role of mother and daughter, on the one hand, she had to try and restore his self-confidence, on the other, he demanded obedience. Klaus's idea to consider the Bahamas as the alternative to an existence which she describes as 'nichts als Schinderei' (*FP* p. 65) was an illusion: 'wir hattten nicht die geringste Aussicht auf die Bahamas zu ziehen. Wir konnten uns kaum so einen Urlaub hier leisten' (*FP* p. 65).

The partner 'caught' in such a relationship is in an 'untenable position':<sup>250</sup> 'Ich hatte allmählich das Gefühl, daß ich das nicht mehr lange aushalte [...] er war verrückt. Er hatte, weil er merkte, daß er nicht gebraucht wurde, einen Grad von Egoismus erreicht, den man Geisteskrankheit nennen sollte' (*FP* p. 67). The receiver is prevented from stepping outside the frame set by the partner's behaviour by either metacommunicating about it or withdrawing, since the other person can easily refuse to accept her communication on the metalevel and label it as evidence for her lack of understanding.

Klaus's unexpected reappearance at the Halm's holiday flat makes clear that Hel is unable to break out of the interactional pattern set by Klaus. According to Watzlawick, paradoxical communication invariably binds those concerned, a

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<sup>250</sup> Compare my elaborations on Watzlawick's study on paradoxical injunctions pp.101-03.

change cannot be generated from within and could only come from outside through intervention of a third party or through a violent change of circumstances set outside the frame of the relationship.<sup>251</sup> It remains open if the suspicion that Klaus had drowned, which encouraged Hel to voice her feelings to Helmut and Sabine, could eventually produce a change in their relationship.

At this stage Hel's attempt to break away from the rigid stability of their relationship fails, as the following excerpts will show:

HEL [...] Klaus, bitte, such dir einen guten Platz. Ich muß nur noch die *Wanderer Fantasie* zuende spielen. *Sie spielt weiter, sieht Klaus an, schenkt sich Calvados ein: Prost! Sie trinkt.*

KLAUS Komm jetzt. (FP p. 70)

KLAUS Er nimmt ihr das Glas aus der Hand. Er riecht daran, wirft es angeekelt weg. Das läßt sie sich gefallen. (FP p. 71)

KLAUS Ich gehe jetzt.

HEL [...] *Sie zündet sich eine Zigarette an, nimmt Helmut's Hut, setzt ihn auf. Leihst du mir den? Komm, Genie, tapfer, gehen wir. Sie schwankt hinaus, Klaus ihr nach. (FP p. 71)*

Hel's monologue sheds light on aspects that, up to this moment, readers and viewers could only speculate about, namely Klaus's apparent show of success, his not always successful striving for eternal youth, the unfortunate pursuit of illusionary alternatives and the consequences his attitude would have for his existence. Hel's professional and private life had been totally attuned to Klaus's needs. Klaus uses Hel to enhance his own image and self esteem, she is significant for his existence, as she provides the confirmation denied by those around him.

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<sup>251</sup> Such an outside possibility would be psychotherapeutic intervention, according to Watzlawick not an easy task, since the power of 'absorption' of anything threatening the rigid stability of this communicational pattern, is in his own words 'truly impressive'. See also Watzlawick's study on 'Paradox in Psychotherapy' in Watzlawick et al., Chapter 7, pp. 230-56.

Since Hel, as the above explanations show, seems to be aware of the situation, it seems reasonable to ask why she is willing to assume the part she is forced to play in their relationship. In this connection it seems advisable to resort to Watzlawick's explanation that while the partner deriving a minimum of gratification from their joint experiences may be diagnosed traditionally as passive-aggressive, self-punishing and so on, this diagnosis fails to grasp the interdependent nature of the couple's dilemma which quite apart from their personality structure may reside exclusively in the nature of their relationship. The exposure to double binding is long-lasting and gradually becomes a habitual experience. It is virtually meaningless to ask when, how and why the pattern was established, for pathological systems, and Hel's and Klaus's relationship fits into this category, have a curiously, self-perpetuating, vicious-circle quality.<sup>252</sup> Hel seems to have clearly recognized the pathologic nature of their relationship but is unable to produce a change. It could be argued that Hel's reaction to Klaus's unexpected reappearance, she continues playing the 'Wanderer Fantasie' and lights a cigarette, could be seen as a possible attempt to break out of the structure of a relationship where she is forced to submit to Klaus.

#### **5.2.6.2 The Turning Point: The Breakdown of Communication**

While the above section sheds light on Hel's and Klaus's relationship it will be useful to refer back to section 5.2.5 to reconstruct the development of the interaction between the protagonists Helmut and Klaus and what motivated Helmut's reaction against Klaus's behaviour. As indicated in section 5.2.5 Helmut is overwhelmed by Klaus's bold and aggressive strategy and his ability to show

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<sup>252</sup> Compare Watzlawick et al., point 6.43 'The Double Bind Theory', pp. 211-18.

off his own lifestyle in contrast to Helmut's uneventful, emotionally impoverished existence, up to the point of suggesting that they – Helmut, himself and Hel – should embark on a life together. Helmut who has consciously renounced the exteriorization of any engagement with the pleasures of life and derives gratification from his ability to keep his real persona unrecognizable, feels exposed. He has been forced by Klaus into a desperate situation where only a drastic change of scenario will bring about the development that will lead to an, albeit partial alteration in the communicational behaviour of the characters. The sailing trip Buch and Halm embark on in spite of severe weather warnings, will influence the further development of the interaction, which the author steers towards an open ending, urging reading and viewing audiences to come to their own conclusions.

Helmut's and Klaus's boat trip, described in detail in the novella of the same name and reported on in the play from Helmut's point of view, is significant for its development. Before proceeding to the analysis of the characters' reactions and their effect on the reader, it will be useful to give an account of Helmut's description. According to him, in spite of the increasing storm, his shouts, demanding that the boat be steered towards the shore, were ignored by Klaus, who was laughing and singing: 'Ich schrie: Hör auf! Dreh um! Er hat nur gelacht. Und gesungen' (*FP* p. 62). In desperation Helmut tore the tiller from his hand, the boat righted itself and Klaus, who was placed dangerously on the edge of the boat fell into the water. Klaus was instantly swallowed by the waves – 'Ich hab ihn sofort nicht mehr gesehen. Ich habe gerufen, gebrüllt' (*FP* p. 62). Helmut threw himself onto the floor of the boat that drifted towards the shore. In Gricean terms, the dialogue provides enough information to set in motion the process of reasoning to

work out what is implied but it stops short of arriving at a conclusion. Pragmatics does not have a vocation of interpreting the multiple symbolisms contained in the instability of a boat navigating on the water into which Klaus ultimately disappears. Our analysis will show, however, that in exploiting the quantity principle (make your contribution as informative as is required) by withholding information from the reader to encourage him to follow his own speculations, the author sets the dialogue in a significant relationship to the content or message which on another level is expressed through symbolisms which are equally open to interpretation.

Readers and audience wonder why an apparently passive 'Kleinbürger' as Helmut calls himself would run the risk of going on a sailing trip in spite of severe weather warnings. Was it the desperate reaction of someone who had been driven by his antagonist to the point where he had been stripped of the self-confidence he now hoped to regain in an open confrontation?

SABINE Du hättest ihn zurückhalten müssen.

HELMUT Nein. Er wollte es wissen. Ich auch. Wir hatten keine Wahl.  
Offenbar. (*FP* p. 61)

How concerned was he that Klaus's constant allusions to his avoidance of new experiences and lack of eroticism showed that he had seen through Helmut's apparent strategy of introversion? And ultimately did he tear the tiller from Klaus's hands in self-defense or did he want him to drown? Helmut's admission in this respect, flouts the maxim of manner (avoid ambiguity):

[...] Ja, stimmt. Mir war es recht, daß er ins Wasser fiel. Es war Angst, Sabine. Panik Wir wären gekippt. Notwehr, Sabine. (*FP* p. 73)

While on the one hand he admits to feeling relief at the thought of removing Klaus from this life, on the other, he wants to convince himself that he has acted in self-defense. The reader may also consider the possibility that Helmut would have acted differently had he been aware of Hel's revelations in Klaus's absence. Hel's monologue (pp. 64-70) makes clear that Klaus's extrovert and over-assertive behaviour in reality only covers the anxieties and insecurities of a vulnerable and failed existence, as Helmut finally realizes:

[...] Weil alles falsch war. Ich habe gedacht, er will auftrumpfen. Mich blamieren. Ich habe überhaupt nichts wahrgenommen von ihm. Ich war zu. Total zu. (FP p.75)

If on the content level Helmut admits his lack of empathy with Klaus, he wants on the relationship level to hold on to his attitude of avoiding emotional involvement, up to the point that he physically wants to escape a confrontation:

HELMUT *geht ins Schlafzimmer, kommt mit einem Koffer zurück.*  
 SABINE Was ist los? Du hast also Klaus ins Wasser geschmissen, ja?!  
*Er zieht sich um.*  
 HELMUT Und wenn wir jetzt packen? Bitte, Sabine. Im Zug erzähl ich alles. Bitte. [...] Bloß raus hier. [...] (FP p. 72)

His intention to escape once more into his inner world is frustrated by Sabine's bald on record strategy – 'Hier geblieben wird' (FP p. 72) – whose intervention at this final stage of the play is significant. The meeting of the two couples, which reaches its climax with Klaus's and Helmut's boat trip, has brought on a situation that calls for a revision of their behavioural strategies. Helmut, who not least because they had Sabine on their side, was unable to avoid Klaus's and Hel's presence, is forced to apply all his internalized avoidance techniques against Klaus's ruthless advances into old memories and intimacies. He finally fails,



forfeiting his carefully rehearsed appearance of superiority through the one reckless action – ‘mir war es recht, daß er ins Wasser fiel’ (see above) . It becomes clear that Klaus has seen through Helmut’s attitude when, after the unfortunate boat trip, he marches into the Halm’s apartment, ordering Hel to leave with him, consciously ignoring Helmut and Sabine. It takes a change of circumstances to put Sabine in charge of a situation where her bald on record strategies contrast with Helmut’s ambiguous reactions. After feeble protestation, he must give in to her demands to confront the Buch’s personally:

SABINE Also?

HELMUT Bleiben wir hier. Das geht nicht. Er muß mir sagen, daß er nicht glaubt ich habe ihn umbringen wollen. [...]

SABINE Also müssen wir hin. [...]

HELMUT So. Dann müssen wir wohl hin. Aber ich darf lügen. [...]

SABINE Ja, ja! Lüg nur! Sag, du magst ihn, findest ihn verwandt, gleichgesinnt [...] Leider hast Du es nicht sofort sagen können, erst jetzt, . . . nach allem . . . [...] (*FP* p. 78)

According to Brown/Levinson one consequence of the positive politeness desire to avoid disagreement is the social lie where the speaker, when confronted with the necessity to state an opinion, prefers to lie rather than damage the hearer’s positive face. This is often done by showing exaggerated interest, approval or sympathy with the hearer, as Sabine suggests Helmut should do here. She, who had been forced to share Helmut’s reclusive way of life (see section 5.2.3), ‘Ich red’ nur noch mit dir, ich verlerne alle anderen Sprachen der Welt ausser der deinen’ (*FP* p. 15), has now the upper hand and her bald on record strategy should have helped Helmut to recognize the fact that he is socially dependent. Helmut’s and Sabine’s relationship may now be based on a more

flexible alternation of symmetrical and complimentary interchanges that will give Sabine and also Helmut the right to question each other's attitudes. In the following I will reconsider the strategies used by the characters and briefly look at the influence the social circumstances might have at the time of the publication of *Ein fliehendes Pferd*. The development of their interaction as well as the open ending calls for the reader/viewer to perceive small signs that suggest a change in their behaviour.

### 5.2.7 Conclusion

It has become clear to readers and viewers that Helmut's and Klaus's life-strategies were misguided but it remains open whether there will be some alteration in the communicational behaviour of the characters, as the following analysis will show. Sabine's bald on record strategy without redressive action forces Helmut, who tries to defend his reluctance with off-record strategies, to face a personal confrontation with Klaus. His reckless, albeit unsuccessful attempt to break free from the emotional challenge that Klaus represents may have lead him to question his own introverted and detached attitude. Klaus's eagerness to impress with his erotic performances and successes and his strategies of self-deception are just as questionable. Whether Klaus and Hel are able to metacommunicate, that is to speak about their communication, remains open. Klaus may have been aware at this point that Hel's monologue in the presence of the Halms has revealed much of their life together. To speak openly about their relationship could now be helpful but, as my elaborations on Watzlawick's theories have shown, it is difficult to break out of the double bind situation that characterizes their relations (see section 5.2.5).

The use of the different pragmatic theories has been helpful in providing an insight into the interactions in the play: Watzlawick's axiom 'the impossibility of not communicating' has been applied to Helmut's and Sabine's interaction, at the point at which Helmut is set on ignoring Sabine's efforts to obtain a visible reaction to the announced visit of the Buchs. Once Sabine has forced him to respond, the debate as to whether the Buchs should be received in their provisional home shows the use of a series of strategies: symmetrical escalations on both sides and, on Helmut's part, flouting of the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle in the form of irony and metaphors, aimed at denigrating the Buchs. Klaus's attitude and the reasons behind it were analysed with the wide range of Brown and Levinson's and also Leech's politeness principles, including the exploitation of social variables like social distance and rating of imposition. Watzlawick's explanation of the implications of the double bind theory is significant for Hel's monologue about her relationship to Klaus and its role in the development of the play. Sabine's and Helmut's final interaction shows the use of off record strategies by Helmut against Sabine's bald on-record reaction.

Having looked at the behaviour of the characters and their motivations it is useful to consider the implications of the social reality at the time of writing the novella and its adaptation for the stage for and understanding of their attitudes. It is likely that the protagonists' behaviour would be influenced by the social demands made on the individual towards the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, when the novella and the play were written and the action is set. In the sixties, mass lay-offs, mine closures and student revolts were part of the political and economic crises which also influenced the literature of the time. Walser, like others, is critical of the socio-economic situation in his

writings, for instance the novellas *Ehen in Philippsburg* (1957) and *Halbzeit* (1960) emphasize how people's actions and reactions are dependent on social and material success. The problems treated in *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, which was written in 1978 and adapted for the theatre in 1985, may appear to be of a more private nature but a link to the social situation of the time can certainly be established. Even if Klaus labels Helmut, a teacher and a civil servant, as a 'Kleinbürger', Hel's revelations (see point 5.2.6.1) indicate that Klaus, a freelance journalist, is under great pressure since he is legally unprotected and lives with the fear of unemployment and social decline. Readers and viewers are inclined to suspect that showing off his sexual potency and his sporting attributes is a way of concealing his professional failure. The ever-increasing demands of the performance – and consumer – oriented society also apply to high erotic achievements. The sexual freedom characteristic of the times seems not to have given Helmut a sense of liberation, he feels instead pressurized by the image of a potent, sexual pleasure seeking male as portrayed and advertised by the mass media and opts for the role of an outsider hiding behind a mask of indifference. His ability to cope with this attitude becomes questionable when he is faced with Klaus's portrayal of himself as a sexually potent figure and with his own awareness of his attraction to Hel. The development of the play also points out how Helmut, according to Klaus's reminiscences a free and outspoken thinker in his youth, has, in Klaus's eyes, adapted to social demands by becoming a resigned and bourgeois conformist. Klaus again and again tries to present Helmut's way of life as conformist and uneventful, ignoring Helmut's ironical attitude that is set to protect his real personality as a way to preserve his inner freedom.

The private attitudes of the protagonists as a main theme of the play is made apparent through the analysis of the language which shows that Helmut and Klaus interact on different levels which must forcibly result in misunderstandings and lack of communication. Whilst the interaction follows a straight and continuous pattern, the final dénouement is set out in a less clear manner that points towards an open ending from which the reader/viewer must draw his own conclusions, as Walser himself states rather optimistically:

Nach meiner Meinung genügt es wenn ein Buch einen Mangel lebhaft macht; dann wird der Leser seine ganze Positivität einsetzen um diesen in der Literatur ausgebreiteten Mangel zu beantworten, in seinem Leben aufzuheben.<sup>253</sup>

On the other hand, within the confines of a socially determined existence, could the individuals, here the two protagonists, not consider the possibility of altering their own attitude by taking a more realistic approach to one another which could have contributed to a more rewarding encounter?

The text of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* suggests diverse levels of valid interpretation. While Reich-Ranicki sees one of the reasons for the success of the play in the fact that, unlike in his previous works, Walser has renounced social criticism – ‘Martin Walser hat offenbar nicht mehr die Absicht mit der Dichtung die Welt zu verändern’<sup>254</sup> – others, like Reinhard Baumgart find that social criticism is a significant issue in the play:

Indem er sich auf das scheinbar Allerprivateste einlässt, auf zwei ihm naheliegende Fluchtmöglichkeiten aus dieser Gesellschaft,

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<sup>253</sup> See Volker Bohn, ‘Ein genau geschlagener Zirkel’, in Siblewski Klaus, ed. *Martin Walser* (Frankfurt, 1981), pp. 150–168.

<sup>254</sup> Compare Marcel Reich-Ranicki ‘Martin Walser’s Rückkehr zu sich selbst. Seine bescheidenste und überzeugendste Arbeit’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (4.3.1978).

kommt etwas ganz und gar politisches zum Vorschein ein soziales System das keinen Lebensinhalt mehr hergibt [... ] Mit keinem Satz redet die Geschichte zur Lage der Nation. Und doch enthält sie als ganzes unsere Lage. Als Geschichte zweier Opfer die sich zu spät als solche erkennen.<sup>255</sup>

In my view the social and political aspect is certainly significant for an understanding of the text but should not be the main point of reference. This study leads to the conclusion that *Ein fliehendes Pferd*, rather than centering on social criticism, is in the first place a play about personal relationships and their aptitude to reflect social and political context.<sup>256</sup> Walser's ability to reproduce the normal speech of the intellectuals of the time presents the conditions for a fairly accurate analysis of dialogue using categories provided by different pragmatic theories. I have demonstrated how Helmut and Klaus cling to their own strategies, one hiding his real feelings behind a mask of indifference and conformism, the other showing off his ability to live up to the requirements of youthful appearance and freedom from the constraints of professional obligations. I have also shown how during the course of their interaction both Helmut's and Klaus's strategies show rifts and that they both conceal their insecurity and fear of not being able to meet the demands of society. I have also been able to demonstrate how within human interaction communicational structures emerge that influence relationships, as can be noted for example in the description of the doublebind structure of Klaus and Hel's relationship.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Reinhard Baumgart, 'Überlebensspiel mit zwei Opfern. Über Martin Walsers "Ein fliehendes Pferd"', in *Der Spiegel* 9, 27 February 1978, pp. 833–835.

<sup>256</sup> See my introduction to this study pointing to the slogan of the 60s and 70s: 'The Personal is political'.

<sup>257</sup> Compare section 5.2.4.

The analytical tools provided by various pragmatic theories shed light on what is concealed by that which is verbally expressed, adding a significant contribution to the understanding of *Ein fliehendes Pferd*. I have also found the analysis with pragmatic concepts of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* as well as of *Die Zimmerschlacht* beneficial in that it also contributes to more general insights into the human behaviours captured by the playwright.

## 5.3 A Delicate Balance

### 5.3.1 Albee's Dramatic Conception: Synopsis

but we communicate and fail to communicate basically by language. (Edward Albee: *Interview with the author*)<sup>258</sup>

Edward Albee's play *A Delicate Balance* that opened in 1969 is set in 'the living room of a large and well appointed suburban house' (DB p. 7) that brings to mind his earlier and most successful play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* where the action is also confined to 'The living room of a house on the campus of a small New England College'.<sup>259</sup> Both sets are designed to serve as the background to what appears to be an upper middle-class conventional and harmonious family life, which as the plays develop is shown to be deceptive.

Tobias and Agnes, with whose interaction the play opens, are a married couple in their late fifties and the main characters in the play. They are, again like Martha and George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, very articulate but lack

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<sup>258</sup> Quoted from C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama Volume 2: Williams, Miller, Albee*, p. 282.

<sup>259</sup> Compare Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, p. 10.

the academic and intellectual pretensions as well as the raw verbal confrontational attitude that characterizes the protagonists of the earlier play. Moreover, *A Delicate Balance* features disciplined and controlled language that gives the play a more restrained and conventional tone with even insults being conveyed in a more quiet and civilized manner.

Alongside Agnes and Tobias, there is Agnes's younger sister Claire who lives with them permanently and is perceived as an alcoholic. She is nevertheless very witty and seems to derive pleasure from annoying and embarrassing Agnes, who in turn shows open disdain for her. There is also the couples' thirty-six-year old daughter Julia, three times divorced, about to leave her fourth husband and who, as on previous occasions, returns home. She now lays claim to her room that has been occupied by Tobias's and Agnes's lifelong friends, Edna and Harry, who suddenly appear at their home and ask to stay with them indefinitely to escape an unnamed terror.

Tobias and Agnes seem to have slipped over the years into an apparently harmonious and undisturbed routine. Their daughter Julia's marital failures and Agnes's sister Claire's drunkenness form part of that routine as in a sense they seem to serve as a confirmation of their own marital success and sobriety. The play suggests from the very beginning that the hyper conventional style of language holds together a fragile family structure which could disintegrate at the slightest disturbance. Agnes's and Tobias's determination to maintain the delicate balance within which the family relationship is held, is shattered by the unexpected appearance of their friends Harry and Edna who seek refuge in their home as they have suddenly been shaken by a perception of terror and existential 'angst' and now demand love and solidarity. This causes a breakdown of the



carefully set up familial structure where each of the members voices his or her own concerns and established behaviours are seriously questioned. The family members are forced to admit that they are unable to live up to the challenge Harry's and Edna's demand poses and will finally return to the *status quo ante*. The following analysis using a number of concepts drawn from communication theorists should allow insight into the interaction of the characters thus helping to unlock the meaning of the play.

### 5.3.2 Agnes and Tobias: Ritualized Interaction

For readers and viewers the set on which the play opens as well as Agnes's and Tobias's attitudes – '*In the library-living room. AGNES is at library table with demitasse cup. TOBIAS is at chair D.L., looking into cordial bottles.*' (DB p. 7) – and their tone of voice – '*AGNES (Speaks usually softly [...]) (DB p. 7),*' '*TOBIAS (He speaks somewhat in the same way.)*' (DB p. 7) –, give an overall picture of conventional ease and harmony. Yet from the very beginning Agnes's meticulously structured syntax suggests other implications. For an analysis of how audiences cope with dialogues that go beyond their surface-level meaning, Brown and Levinson's framework of off-record communication presents a useful tool to account for these kind of utterances and how they are understood. A short explanation of the meaning of this concept will contribute to a better appreciation of the play. Speakers use off-record strategies when they hint at what they mean without stating it directly. It has been set out in detail in the theoretical chapter of this work and also referred to in reference to the two plays previously analysed that Brown and Levinson draw on Grice's Cooperative Principle to outline how their own off-record speech acts are to be understood. According to Grice's

theory, people's contributions to talk are presumed to be informative (maxim of quantity), truthful (maxim of quality), relevant (maxim of relation) and clear (maxim of manner). By flouting one or several of these maxims the speaker invites the hearer to search for an interpretation of the utterance that makes sense in the context. Deliberate failures to observe the various maxims occur at the level of discourse between the interactants as well as on the writer-audience level. I will quote Agnes's opening words and then refer to some parts of the interaction to indicate how applying off-record strategies contributes to the understanding of the play:

[...] What I find most astonishing – aside from that belief of mine, [...] which never ceases to surprise me by the very fact of its surprising lack of unpleasantness, the belief that I might very easily – as they say – lose my mind one day, not that I suspect I am about to, or am even . . . nearby . . . (DB p. 7)

The interaction that follows contains only short and noncommittal contributions on Tobias's part while Agnes monopolizes the conversation over a long stretch. Here, she flouts the maxim of relation as instead of following up the introduction – 'what I found most astonishing' – she deflects into speculation about becoming mentally disturbed, which she envisions in great detail, again interspersed with references to Tobias's activities around the bar – 'what are you looking for, Tobias?' (DB p. 7) or 'TOBIAS [...] Cognac? AGNES Yes; [...]' (DB p. 8). The use of off-record strategies allows Agnes on the one hand to consider the possibility of mental derangement – '[...] since I speculate I might some day, [...] go quite mad, then I very well might. [...]' (DB p. 8) only to insist that she 'could never do it – go adrift – for what would become of you?' (DB p. 7).

Agnes's tendency to flout the maxim of relevance may alert an observant reader to the implications of what appears on the surface as the amiable chat of a married couple. Why does Agnes, when according to Tobias 'there is no saner woman on earth' (*DB* p. 7), play with the idea of becoming insane and is there a hidden threat in her half-hearted insinuation that the 'burdens' (see *DB* p. 9) the family members inflict upon her may become too much to bear? The reader may also wonder how significant for the development of the play is Agnes's meticulously controlled and disciplined use of language. Elaborating extensively on the possibility of mental disturbance will not prevent her from syntactically linking to the introductory phrase as the following quote indicates:

What astonishes me most – aside from my theoretically healthy fear – no, not fear, how silly of me – healthy speculation that I might some day become an embarrassment to you . . . what I find most astonishing in this world, and with all my years . . . is Claire. (*DB* p. 8)

By introducing an overstatement – 'what I find most astonishing in this world' – Agnes wants to secure the effect of her utterance. Tobias who up to this point has managed not to take her observations seriously by either resorting to the ritual of offering drinks or bantering – '(*raises his glass*) To my mad lady, ribbons dangling' (*DB* p. 8) – is challenged into reacting: '(*Curious*) Why?' (*DB* p. 8).

The following interaction between Agnes and Tobias will give readers a first indication of the places assigned to the individual members in the family unit. Agnes's reply 'That anyone – be they one's sister or not – can be so ...well, I don't want to use an unkind word 'cause we are cosy here, aren't we?' (*DB* pp. 8-9) is off-record as she tries to minimize the impolite implication towards Claire by making a more indirect accusation using the impersonal 'they' and 'one'. The

ellipsis that follows leaves the implication hanging in the air and the phrase ‘I don’t want to use an unkind word’ sets the speaker off record by being vague instead of openly offensive. The wording ‘cause we are cosy here, aren’t we?’ is an attempt at Positive Politeness since with the inclusive ‘we’ form the speaker calls upon a common assumption and with the use of intimate familiar language Agnes invokes common ground and shared associations. Ignoring Tobias’s disapproving reaction ‘(*Smiled warning.*) Maybe’ (DB p. 9), Agnes pursues the vilification of Claire, varying a quotation from *King Lear*, ‘As the saying has it, the one thing sharper than a serpent’s tooth is a sister’s ingratitude’ (DB p. 9) instead of the original ‘How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child’.<sup>260</sup> By using an incorrect citation Agnes flouts the maxim of quality giving another proof amongst many that she manipulates language to suit her own purpose: ‘TOBIAS. [...] The saying does not have it that way. AGNES. Should’ (DB p. 9) She formulates the above statement in the form of a conventional cliché and as such it functions as a generally accepted truth that escapes questioning. Readers will soon be made aware of Agnes’s determination to control the family and of her endeavours to cast its members into a role that fits into her own idea of maintaining the balance of the family unit, as the following conversation will show.

Claire’s attempts at not being cast as an alcoholic triggers an interaction that gives a picture of the individual characters and the strategies that confirm their roles:

What I did not have in common with those people (Alcoholic Anonymous m.n.). That they were alcoholics, and I was not. That I

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<sup>260</sup> Compare W. Shakespeare, ‘King Lear’ in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (London: Penguin Classics, 1974), p. 890.

was just a drunk. That they couldn't help it; I could, and wouldn't. That they were sick, and I was merely... wilful. (DB p. 20)

Agnes will strongly oppose Claire's perception of herself and her violent reaction is due to the fact that only by labelling Claire as an alcoholic can she make sure that she will not be taken seriously. As the development of the play shows Claire will often cause embarrassment by exposing Agnes's manipulations of reality thereby threatening Agnes's carefully maintained balance. Hence, Agnes for once loses her carefully maintained self-control and resorts to extremes in the form of bald on record strategies to avoid Claire being taken seriously:

*(There is true passion here; we see under the calm a little.)* I WILL NOT TOLERATE IT!! I WILL NOT HAVE YOU! *(Softer, but tight-lipped.)* Oh, God. I wouldn't mind for a moment if you filled your bathroom with it, lowered yourself in it, DROWNED! I rather wish you would give me the peace of mind to know you could do something well, thoroughly. If you want to kill [...] yourself – then do it *right!* (DB p. 21)

Tobias will express his dislike of Agnes's aggressive, authoritative statements, as in the above example, with half-hearted off-record utterances in defense of Claire: 'Please Agnes...' or '*(To AGNES, a little pleading in it.)* She isn't an alcoholic. . .she says she can drink some' (DB p. 21). Agnes finally establishes the rules by asserting her social position over Claire:

AGNES. [...] If we change for the worse with drink, we are an alcoholic. It is as simple as that.

CLAIRE. And who is to say!

AGNES. I!

CLAIRE. *(A litany)* If we are to live here, on Tobias' charity, then we are subject to the will of his wife. [...]

AGNES. Those are the ground rules. (DB p. 22)

Brown and Levinson's explanation of socially defined variables of distance, power and ranking of imposition that contribute to the determination of the level of politeness with which an act will be communicated is useful for the interpretation of Agnes's attitude. The above interaction shows that Agnes exploits the social dimension of power from which she deduces the right to determine the rules for Claire's conduct: here material and economic control, to which Agnes is entitled through her marital status.<sup>261</sup>

Tobias's silence at Claire's appeal for help is a conflict-avoidance strategy and the failure to react when it is expected by another party can be interpreted as a sign of hostility. Claire's expression of disappointment fits this interpretation: '(A *sad smile*.) Tobias (*Pause*) Nothing? (*Pause* [...]) Are those the ground rules? Nothing? Too...settled? Too...dried up? Gone?' (DB p. 22).<sup>262</sup>

As has been mentioned above the implications of Agnes's out of character outburst at Claire's attempt to cast off the role of an alcoholic may be seen as a way for Agnes to justify that as long as she is marked as an alcoholic, Claire with her reckless and often truthful remarks does not upset the familial balance Agnes is set on maintaining. According to Watzlawick the existence of a 'patient' is often essential for the stability of the family system that will react unfavourably to any internal or external attempts at changing its organization and in this sense Claire's alcoholism contributes to the maintenance of a *status quo* that is resistant to change.<sup>263</sup> Regine Brede comments on the role Agnes has ascribed to Claire:

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<sup>261</sup> See my elaborations on Brown and Levinson's explanations of Exploitation of Strategies, section 4.2.3.

<sup>262</sup> See A. Jaworski, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (London-New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1957-1993), p. 25.

<sup>263</sup> Compare my elaborations on Watzlawick et al., *The Organization of Human Interaction*, Section 4.3.1.2, point 2, 'Feedback and Homeostasis'.

Für Agnes wird Claires Anwesenheit in dem Augenblick zu einer echten Bedrohung, da sie gezwungen werden soll, Claire Ernst zu nehmen, d.h. wenn diese die ihr zudiktierte Rolle der 'Kranken' und Unzurechnungsfähigen abstreift.<sup>264</sup>

Audiences are also informed in this first scene that Agnes's and Tobias's daughter Julia is returning to her parents' home after her fourth failed marriage: 'CLAIRE. Right on schedule, once every three years....' (DB p. 23). Their behavioural pattern towards Julia bears similarities to the approach to Claire. Agnes's resigned acceptance of Julia's regularly recurring return to the parental home sounds more like a formal obligation than a sign of sympathy:

[...] It *is* her home, we are her parents, the *two* of us and we have our obligations to her, and I have reached an age, Tobias, when I wish we were always alone, you and I, without . . . hangers-on. . . or anyone. (DB p. 23)

Claire and Julia are only tolerated by Agnes and Tobias's off-record utterance 'But wasn't Julia happy? You didn't tell me anything about. . .' (DB p. 23) which suggests his disengaged attitude to family life indicates his reluctance to question Agnes's behaviour.

Having established the nature of the family dynamics, in the following section I can examine the response of the family members to the intrusion of Harry and Edna and the demands for choice this entails.

### 5.3.3 The Disruption of the Balance: Harry and Edna

From the very beginning of Harry's and Edna's appearance on the scene, readers and viewers are aware of a disquieting element in their behaviour as well

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<sup>264</sup> R. Brede, p. 164.

as of Agnes's and Tobias's efforts to play down what seem to be feelings of anxiety Edna and Harry are eager to reveal. As can be seen from the following extract from the interaction: more than their words, Agnes's and Tobias's tone and gestures indicate uneasiness:

AGNES Edna? Harry? What a surprise! Tobias, it's Harry and Edna. Come in. Why don't you take off your . . .  
 (HARRY and EDNA enter... *They seem somewhat ill at ease for such close friends.*)  
 TOBIAS. [...] Edna!  
 EDNA. Hello Tobias.  
 HARRY. (*Rubbing his hands; attempts at being bluff.*) Well, now!  
 .....  
 AGNES. (*Jumping in, just as a tiny silence commences. Crosses to R. chair and sits.*) Sit down. We were just having a cordial....(*Curiously loud.*) Have you been...out? Uh, to the Club? (DB p. 27)

Agnes suspects that Edna and Harry have come with an urgent and apparently disturbing demand on Agnes and Tobias which she is set on preventing them from expressing. Brown and Levinson's strategy of Negative Politeness seems useful to analyse Agnes's behaviour. Whereas Positive Politeness attempts to establish a certain intimacy, expressing similarity between hearer's and speaker's desires, Negative Politeness is focused on minimising a particular imposition by being conventionally indirect, thereby trying to give the hearer an 'out'. Whenever Edna and Harry try to approach the subject, Agnes forces the conversation back into a conventional area. Claire's repeated attempts at urging the visitors to address openly the reason for their unexpected visit – 'Why did you come? (DB p. 29) or 'What happened Harry?' (DB p. 29) – is firmly rejected by Agnes with Tobias's support:



AGNES. Please! *Claire!* [...] We're glad you're here; we're glad you came to surprise us!  
 TOBIAS. (*Quickly.*) Yes! [...] (*DB p. 29*)

Claire's bald on record strategy appears as a Positive Politeness strategy since she conveys the impression of primarily acting in Harry's and Edna's interest by being sympathetic to their request. The confrontation of Claire's bald on record approach and Agnes's strategy of avoidance must eventually lead to an impasse, with Harry and Edna finally voicing their emotional distress and the reason for their sudden visit:

HARRY (*Looks at EDNA .*) I...I don't know quite what happened then; we...we were...it was all very quiet , and we were all alone... (*EDNA begins to weep quietly; AGNES notices, the others do not; AGNES does nothing.*) ...and then ... nothing happened, but...  
 EDNA (*Open weeping; loud.*) WE GOT...FRIGHTENED (*Open sobbing; no one moves.*) (*DB pp. 30-31*)

As an extension of Grice, Leech proposed that interlocutors in talk also start with assumptions concerning more affective variables and suggested a number of additional maxims to explain this. One of these, the sympathy maxim, seems appropriate to account for Tobias' and Agnes's reaction to the friends' plea. The maxim states that speakers will maximize the expression of sympathy in talk unless they have a good reason not to. As the above stage instructions show Tobias and Agnes are reluctant to show sympathy at the friends' obvious distress. This induces Harry and Edna to head for a bald on record strategy by invoking the rights that accrue them by virtue of their mutual friendship:

HARRY (*Matter-of-fact, but a hint of daring under it.*) We couldn't stay there, and so we came here. You're our very best friends.  
 EDNA (*Crying softly now.*) In the whole world. (*DB p. 31*)

As Agnes is, albeit reluctantly forced to agree – ‘(*A deep breath control.*)

Well, we'll...you did the right thing . . . of course.’ (*DB p. 31*) – the friends go a step further by announcing their, for Agnes and Tobias disconcerting, decision to stay:

EDNA Can I go to bed now? Please?

AGNES (*Distant.*) Bed?

EDNA [...] I'm so ...tired.

HARRY You're our best friends in the world. Tobias?

TOBIAS (*A little bewilderment; rote.*) Of course we are, Harry.  
 (*DB pp. 31-32*)

I refer again to the socially and situationally defined variables established by Brown and Levinson that are significant for the assessment of the level of politeness of a speech act. The speaker and the hearer will have some estimate of these variables and may chose to rerank the weight of one of them at the expense of the others. Harry bases his request to stay, as it turns out indefinitely, on mutual assumptions of their social distance by acting as if the rate of imposition is smaller than he knows and knows that Tobias and Agnes know. Their reaction shows that they are not prepared to accept Harry's and Edna's assessment of the situation which, as can be seen from the above quotations is implied more by nonverbal language than it is by words. At this point of the development Harry and Edna have the upper hand.

### 5.3.4 'Crises sure brings out the best in us, don't it Tobe?'

(CLAIRE DB p. 81)

Readers will have gathered from the first scene that Agnes and Tobias are a reasonably well adjusted couple who take in their stride the problems caused by Claire's alcoholism and their daughter Julia's marital problems. It also becomes clear that Agnes draws on the right to lay down the rules of behaviour for the family unit while Tobias, albeit not always in agreement, chooses to withdraw into avoidance strategies. The unexpected presence of Edna and Harry questions and threatens established patterns of behaviour: how the characters react to the demands that are made upon them will be looked at in the following.

Agnes's and Julia's interaction, '[....] *Before dinner next evening* JULIA and AGNES *alone* [....]' (DB p. 33), shows Julia's reaction and also provides an insight into their relationship. Julia reacts with despair and anger at the intrusion of Harry and Edna into the home. Her bald on record strategies are unpremeditated and emotional and she wants to attain by force what she feels is rightfully hers: 'Do you think I like it? Do you?' and 'What about that! I come home: my room is full of Harry and Edna. I have no place to put my things....' (DB p. 33). Agnes fails to observe the sympathy maxim, reprimanding Julia in a patronizing fashion instead of trying to show some empathy and understanding at her emotional outburst: 'Julia!' or 'Will you be still?' and 'Just...let it be' (DB p.33). Agnes, as can also be seen from the further development of the play, speaks to Julia as one would to a child: 'You are tired; we'll talk about it later...' (DB p. 45) or 'When we are dealing with children' (DB p. 45). Julia's response to Agnes treating her like a child is unmitigated by the rules of politeness that govern adult behaviour – 'Great Christ! What the hell did I come home to? And why?' (DB p.

37). Leech speaks of conflictive illocutionary goals that clash with social goals, where politeness is out of the question since by their very nature they are designed to cause offence, as for instance accusing or cursing. According to Leech, in normal circumstances conflictive illocutions tend to be rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour. Presumably in the course of socialization children learn to replace conflictive communication by other types of illocutions. To readers and viewers, Julia's childlike demands for love and community imply that she has never achieved individuation. At the age of thirty-six she is still dependent on the protection of the parental home where she seeks refuge after each failed marriage. Agnes and Tobias accord her, albeit grudgingly, the right to return to their home but express disapproval of her behaviour:

TOBIAS [...] You, you fill this house with your whining.  
 JULIA [...] I DON'T ASK TO COME BACK HERE!!  
 TOBIAS YOU BELONG HERE! [...] (DB p. 38)

The approbation maxim, one of Leech's additions to the Politeness Principle that accounts for more affective variables, could be applied to Tobias's and Agnes's attitude towards Julia. At Julia's attempt to talk about her latest marital failure, Agnes will only react '*(Dry.)* You choose well, Julia' (DB p. 52). If the maxim says 'avoid saying unpleasant things about others, more particularly about the hearer', it becomes clear that Agnes in particular is ruthless in her use of bald on record strategies to relegate Julia to her place in the family unit so as not to endanger the fragile balance she is determined to maintain, while at the same time implying that the other members of the family will react to Julia's problems not with empathy but out of self-interest:

I shall keep it in shape. If I am a drill sergeant. . . so be it. Since nobody ...*really* wants to talk about your latest. . . marital disorder really wants to talk *around* it, use it as an excuse for all sorts of horrid little revenges . . . I think we can at least keep the table . . . uncluttered of *that*. (DB p. 48)

On the writer-reader level it is suggested off record that Julia's efforts to voice her concerns are rejected by Agnes since an open talk could question the values of a system she is set on holding on to. In her own words: 'To keep in shape. Most people [...] assume it means alteration, when it does not. [...] when we keep something in shape, we maintain its shape. [...] we keep *it* from falling apart. [...]' (DB p.47). Agnes, who sees herself as the 'fulcrum' of the family (see DB p. 48), tries to evade problems, let alone emotional issues that might upset the balance she is set on maintaining. As has been explained before, she insists on assigning a role to each of the family members and she uses her communicational strategies to induce them to act accordingly. Claire who views her role in the family as an 'objective observer' (DB p. 43) states: 'We can't have changes – throws the balance off' (DB p. 79).

Claire often resorts to on record strategies, as when, against Agnes's resistance, she prompts Harry and Edna to voice the reason for their unexpected visit. She also adopts face-threatening acts without redressive action which in some cases may lead to a more spontaneous communication. However, indiscriminate use of this strategy may cause embarrassment to hearers since it implies insensitivity to their feelings and Claire's open disregard of the Politeness Principle, especially the tact maxime, causes awkward situations. One of the reasons for not redressing the FTA is that the speaker does not care about

maintaining face and Claire has been cast into a role where she is not to be taken seriously. This is how Ronald Haymann sees her attitude:

Because she has no real relationship with anyone, Claire has nothing to lose, no balance to preserve. She can therefore afford to be honest about the facts of her own life and to probe rudely into the facts of other people's.<sup>265</sup>

Nevertheless the destructive power of her observations is not associated with any positive initiative, and she, like the others, is unable to break out of her role and to question seriously her own lack of commitment. While Claire rebukes others for their little evasions and deceits, she herself is unable to cope with reality. Part of Claire's evasion tactics are her constant demands for alcoholic beverages, her antics with the accordion (*DB* p. 63) pretending to diffuse the tenseness of a situation ('*A chord then begins to yodel*', *DB* p.63) and her infantile sing-songs, here referring to Julia's marital problems:

CLAIRE (*A mocking sing-song*) Philip loved to gamble,  
Charlie loved the boys  
Tom went after women.  
Douglas. . . .(*DB* p. 24)

Claire's utterances are bald on record strategies that often express realities but her gross flouts of the tact maxime seem to be purposely designed to stir up animosities. The pressure caused by Harry's and Edna's presence in the household has come to breaking point and while Agnes is trying to keep the situation under control, Claire's utterance could be seen as an off-record strategy since it implies that the choices are narrowed down to two alternatives which may both have an unsettling effect on the family unit:

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<sup>265</sup> R. Hayman, *Contemporary Playwrights Edward Albee* (London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1971), p. 70.

CLAIRE You've only got two choices, Sis. You take 'em in or you throw 'em out.  
 AGNES [...] Ah, how simple it is from the side-lines. [...]  
 TOBIAS [...] We'll do neither, I'd imagine. Take in; throw out.  
 CLAIRE Oh?  
 TOBIAS (*A feeling of nakedness.*) Well, yes, they're just . . . passing through. (DB p. 52)

Tobias hopes that he can at least defer a decision, that somehow the problem will resolve itself. But at this point of the development Harry and Edna, acting on the assumption that they have a right to stay, make full use of their position. Readers and viewers are aware that Edna and Harry have taken over Agnes's and Tobias's role to the point where they mirror their behaviour. Edna adopts Agnes's commanding tone, admonishing Julia in the rhythms of Agnes's speech by bluntly flouting the tact maxime, while Harry is more hesitant and less decisive. Julia feels displaced and is driven to hysterical defense when Harry takes over the bar which she considers her father's prerogative and sees as the definitive usurpation of her place in the family. Julia's child-like behaviour, her complete disregard for the politeness principle in her demands to the right for protection in the parental home, has been discussed above (see above at the beginning of section 5.3.4). Her reaction to Edna's and Harry's claim to share or even take over Tobias's and Agnes's role – '[...] YOU ARE A GUEST IN THIS HOUSE!!' (DB p. 55) and 'I WANT. . . WHAT IS MINE' [...] (DB p. 57) – becomes so unpredictable that she threatens to shoot Edna and Harry – '(JULIA *appears in the archway, unseen by the others; her hair is wild, her face is tear-streaked; she carries TOBIAS' pistol; [...] They ALL see JULIA and the gun simultaneously, [...]*' (DB p. 64).

Once Agnes '[...] *exits with JULIA. Silence.*' Edna demands '(*Something of a demand here.*) We haven't come to the wrong place, have we?' (DB p. 66). Leech

speaks of ‘second-instance implicature’ referring to questions that exist in the speaker’s mind as an assumption that expects the answer *no*: ‘TOBIAS (*Pause; gentle, sad.*) No; of course you haven’t’ (*DB* p. 66).<sup>266</sup> Edna’s question does not allow for a negative reply on Tobias’s part even if, as the script directions indicate, he feels reluctant to comply with her demand.

### 5.3.5 Tobias’s Insight

The dramatic development in this last act presents Tobias as the most crucial character since he not only confronts his own flaws but also acknowledges the desire to make changes and, in his final emotional speech, shows self-awareness and courage. To define Tobias as the focus of the play is not to undermine the importance of the other characters: it has been explained that relationships may be viewed as ‘feedback loops’, since the behaviour of each person affects and is affected by the behaviour of others. Watzlawick speaks of the circularity of communicational patterns, stating that when people claim to be reacting only to the partner’s behaviour they do not realize that they in turn influence the partner by their reaction.<sup>267</sup>

In the following I will attempt to analyse how Tobias’s interaction with the other characters reveals their as well as his own shortcomings. Readers and viewers learn in act three that the death of Agnes’ and Tobias’ son Teddy when he was still a child altered their relationship. After Teddy’s death Tobias sought to protect himself from further pain and loss related to parenthood. In his sexual relationship with Agnes he moved from *coitus interruptus* to withdrawal by

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<sup>266</sup> See G. Leech, Section 7.3.3.4, ‘Loaded yes-no questions’, p. 167.

<sup>267</sup> See my elaborations on P. Watzlawick et al., section 4.3.1.2 ‘The Organization of Human Interaction’.



sleeping in a separate bedroom. Agnes was hurt and protested vehemently as can be gathered from the following:

. . . I think it was a year, when you spilled yourself on my belly, sir? "Please? Please, Tobias?" No, you wouldn't even say it out: I don't want another child, but please don't. . . leave me like that. Such. . . silent. . . sad. Disgusted. . .love. (*DB* p. 75)

The action of the play depicts Agnes's role, in her own words as a 'drill sergeant' and 'a martinet' (*DB* p. 48). Yet, the opening of act 3 presents her briefly as an erotically responsive and loving wife frustrated by Tobias's rejection. Tobias's sexual withdrawal reflects his withdrawal from any risks and his attitude to life in general. Readers ask themselves if the writer is suggesting off-record that Tobias's rejection of Agnes as a feminine and sexually aware partner and his lack of response, emblematic of his inaction, fear of exposure and attempts to elude responsibility, have made her into an authoritarian and aggressive character set on imposing apparent order on the external world to compensate for internal disorder. Agnes on the other hand, seems to have been well disposed to throwing all her energy into what she declares to be the position of a – 'fulcrum' (*DB* p. 48) – on which the family balance rests. In this last act where they are forced to confront the problem of Harry's and Edna's presence Agnes is eager to live up to the part of the decisive, controlling character she is expected to play. Despite Agnes's transparent efforts to shift the responsibility onto Tobias, claiming that she is leaving the decision to him, her strategies are directed at influencing Tobias to execute her will. His attempts at trying to show understanding for Harry's and Edna's behaviour are repeatedly cut short by her question – 'What did you decide?' – (*DB* pp. 70-71). Agnes's refusal to shoulder the responsibility – 'TOBIAS. [...] You've got to help me here AGNES. No. I

don't think so' (DB p. 71) – turns into a symmetrical escalation between herself and Tobias:

AGNES. [...] But there are things we do not do.  
 TOBIAS (*slightly edgy challenge.*) Yes?  
 AGNES Yes. (*Harder*) We don't decide the route.  
 TOBIAS You're copping out. . .as they say.  
 AGNES No, indeed.  
 TOBIAS (*Quiet anger.*) Yes, you are!  
 AGNES (*Quiet warning.*) Don't you yell at me.  
 TOBIAS You're copping out!  
 AGNES. (*Quiet, calm, and almost smug.*) We follow, we let our. . . men  
                   decide the moral issues.  
 TOBIAS (*Quite angry. Crosses above coffee table, throws afghan  
                   on D. L. chair.*) Never! You've never done that in your life!  
 (DB p. 72)

Agnes's repeated use of the plural 'we' is a way to distance herself from the FTA by making her declarations into an instance of a general social rule. But at this point Albee's dramatic strategy places Tobias at the centre of the dramatic situation, defending Harry's and Edna's right to stay by confronting the recognition of his own inadequacy in relation to the equally flawed characters around him. First there is an acrimonious symmetrical escalation between Julia and himself, as in the following excerpt:

TOBIAS [...] I *thought*. I sat down here and I thought about all of us. . .and  
                   everything. Now Harry and Edna have come to us and. . . asked  
                   for help.  
 JULIA That is not true! They have not *asked* for anything!  
 AGNES Please, Julia. . .  
 JULIA They have *told!* They have come in here and *ordered!*  
 .....  
 JULIA (*Adamant*) Those people have no right!  
 TOBIAS No right? All those years? We've known them since... For God's  
                   sake, Julia, those people are our *friends!*  
 .....  
 JULIA (*To Tobias*) You bring these people in here, Father, and I am  
                   leaving!  
 .....

TOBIAS (*Frustration and rage*) HARRY AND EDNA ARE OUR  
 FRIENDS!!  
 JULIA (*Equal.*) THEY ARE INTRUDERS!! (*Silence*) (DB pp. 80-81)

Though Agnes previously appeared to claim that she was leaving the decision to him she now openly coerces Tobias into evicting Harry and Edna from their home. To justify her demand, she reverts to a strategy she is shown to have used repeatedly during the development of the play. By depersonalizing the characters, she makes her statements into a generally accepted and irrevocable truth: ‘It is not Edna and Harry who have come to us – our friends – it is a disease’ (DB p. 82). Agnes describes Edna and Harry as ‘the plague’ and ‘the terror sitting in the room upstairs’ (DB p. 83), that makes them all vulnerable to the risk of infection. Tobias resists Agnes’s cunning formulations with bald on record strategies: there is urgency and desperation in his plea:

I’ve not been. . . *wrestling* with some . . . abstract problem! These are *people*! Harry and Edna! These are our friends, God damn it!  
 (DB p. 82)

Harry and Edna have come to test the cliché that Claire referred to in Act 1 – ‘Would you give friend Harry the shirt off your back, as they say? TOBIAS: [...] I *suppose* I would. He is my best friend’ (DB p. 17). Up to this point Tobias’s strategies were characterized by negative politeness: his lack of engagement, his endeavours to protect himself from any commitment, his unquestioned consent to Agnes’s decisions, the wish not to impinge on other people’s wants, are Negative Politeness strategies. Contrary to Positive Politeness where people are understood to share specific wants and values, Negative Politeness is essentially avoidance-based. Tobias, as the development of the play shows, had limited his duty to acting as an amiable host substituting small acts of sociability, like serving drinks,

for acts of real commitment. The sudden confrontation with his own and the others' selfish evasion of human commitment makes him resort to bald on record strategies in a desperate attempt to persuade them to salvage what little is left from their misspent years:

No, Agnes, for God's sake, if . . . if that's all Harry and Edna mean to us, then. . . what about *us*? When we talk to each other . . . what have we meant? Anything? When we touch, when we promise, and say. . . yes, or please. . . with *ourselves*? . . . have we meant, yes, but only if. . . if there's any condition, Agnes! Then it's. . . all been empty. (*DB* pp. 82-83)

During the development of the play, readers and viewers are repeatedly confronted with declarations by the characters that suggest that they recognize their own shortcomings and foresee the consequences of their behaviour. These predictions are frequently voiced by Claire but on occasions also by the other characters. Claire acknowledges that Harry's and Edna's arrival would trigger the family crisis she had foreseen: '(*A small sad chuckle.*) I was wondering when it would begin. . . when it would start' (*DB* p. 32).

Tobias's hesitant utterance '[...] It's . . . it's too late, or something' (*DB* p. 42) is also a mournful admission of the futility of trying to reverse the strategy of evasion and non-commitment that each of them has pursued in their own way. Yet, when Harry finally acknowledges that if the situation were reversed he would not want Tobias and Agnes in their house, Tobias tries through a desperate act of will to make it otherwise:

TOBIAS [...] I sat up all night and I thought about it, Harry and I talked to Agnes, too, before you all came down, and. . . By God, it isn't easy, Harry . . . but we can make it . . . if you want us to . . . *I* can, I mean, I *think* I can.

HARRY No . . . we're going. Tobias. (*DB* p. 86)

Harry's bald on record strategy is a clear rejection of Tobias's attempts at persuading him to stay. His repeated questions 'Do you *want* us here, Tobias' and 'Do you *want* us here?' (twice) have the force of an imperative, since the question is formulated in a relatively rude way with the present tense giving rise to the implicature that it is likely that Tobias does not want the guests to stay. Finally, the negative question '[....] You. . . you don't want us, do you Toby? You don't want us here' (DB p. 87) further undermines Tobias's efforts. By asking a question with no intention of obtaining an answer and by providing the answer himself, Harry breaks the quality maxim on questions.

The pressure on Tobias has reached a breaking point, he sees himself through Harry's eyes and is moved to intense disgust in a final courageous and ultimately powerless attempt to salvage what is left from his misspent years. According to Albee's notations this next speech is an aria: '*(It must have in its performance all the horror and exuberance of a man who has kept his emotions under control too long.)*' (DB p. 86). An aria is a self-contained piece for one voice that can express a variety of intense feelings like love, hate, anger and sorrow. From a pragmatic point of view Tobias's emotional outbreak can be looked at with Watzlawick's theory of digital and analogue communication.<sup>268</sup> The content aspect is likely to be conveyed digitally whereas the nature of the relationship aspect will be predominantly analogic. On the one hand there can be no doubt that we communicate digitally, particularly for the sharing of information and yet there exists a vast area where we rely on analogue communication.

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<sup>268</sup> Compare P. Watzlawick et al., Section 2.5 'Digital and Analogical Communication', pp. 60-67. See also my elaborations in section 4.3.1.1 on the subject.

According to Watzlawick, digital language has a logical syntax but lacks adequate semantics in the field of relationships, while analogic language possesses the semantics but has no adequate syntax for the unambiguous definition of the nature of relationships. He observes that analogic messages have an ambiguous and often antithetical quality which Tobias's outpouring of feelings, in contrast to his previous self-controlled speech behaviour, clearly shows. He starts with '*(Softly, and as if the words were unfamiliar.)* Want? [...]' What? Do I what?' and then continues as follows:

*(Abrupt laugh; joyous)* DO I WANT? *(More laughter; also a sob.)*  
DO I WANT YOU HERE! [...] you come in here, you come in  
here with your . . wife, and with your . . .terror ! And you ask me if  
I want you here! [...] YES! OF COURSE ! I WANT YOU HERE!  
[...] *(DB p. 87)*

In lengthy and contradictory utterances Tobias juxtaposes love and duty in a variety of voice inflections which are opposed to each other as in the following examples: '*(soft and fast, almost monotonous), (a shout.), (Soft again laughter and tears in it.), (Shout.)*' *(DB pp. 87-88)*. The final admission is that he is torn between his desire for commitment to love and the failure to live up to the moral and emotional values this implies:

I DON'T WANT YOU HERE! I DON'T LOVE YOU! BUT BY  
GOD. . .YOU STAY!! *(Pause)* STAY! *(Softer.)* Stay! *(Soft, tears.)*  
Stay. Please? *(Pause.)* Stay? Please? Stay? *(DB p. 88)*

Tobias's uncontrollable emotional outburst '*carried to the edge of hysteria*' *(DB p. 87)* signals sorrow and joy, laughter and tears. Contradictory impulses

exist side by side without neutralizing each other. It is characteristic of analogical communication that it has no qualifiers to indicate which of the two discrepant meanings is implied. Hence the difficulties for a sender to verbalise his own analogic utterances that often have a strong a verbal component. Yet, if we bear in mind that the first consequence of a breakdown in communication is often a partial loss of the ability to metacommunicate digitally about the contingencies of a relationship, analogical message material appears as a plausible compromise solution. But Harry and Edna's decision to leave has been made and Tobias's emotional outburst more than confirmed what Harry had expressed before, the sad realization that Tobias and Agnes as well as Harry and Edna themselves – 'I told Edna [...] if they'd come to us like this [...] I wouldn't take them in [...] they don't have any right' (DB p. 86)' – are unable to meet the claims of true friendship. The friends' demand for shelter threatens the fragile balance that Agnes is set on maintaining and which is also in the interest of the other family members to keep up. That they have been able to return to *the status quo ante* is indicated by Agnes's introductory words towards the end which are identical to those of the opening of the play 'What I find most astonishing – aside from my belief that I will one day . . . lose my mind' (DB p. 92).

Albee's dramatic principle shows a strategy of circularity in characterization and language. The play begins and culminates with Agnes's identical words which indicate that the structure of the relationships has remained unaltered. To explain the play's cycle I will turn to Watzlawick's definition of circularity in human communication. As mentioned before Watzlawick maintains that in interaction, event *a* affects *b* which in turn affects *c* that then leads back to *a* in a circular system, a pattern that is reinforced through feedback. Feedback can be either

positive or negative. Watzlawick describes negative feedback as a steady state that is significant for the achievement and maintenance of the stability of a relationship, while positive feedback acts as a measure for change and may often lead to the loss of stability. In families that contain a member showing 'abnormal' behaviour, the existence of the 'patient' can be essential for the stability of the family system. It has been explained before that Claire's alcoholism and Julia's immaturity as well as Tobias's passivity call forth Agnes's authoritative manner which in spite of Claire's and Julia's protestations establishes the guidelines that appear to uphold the stability of the system. Clearly theirs is an undesirable state of stability since successful relationships should be both stable and open to change, something which will be reflected in specific forms of interdependency and complementarity. The examination of the text has shown that the members of Tobias's household 'teeter unconcerned or uncaring' (AGNES p. 48) and that each character is only concerned with the 'awful din of [their] privacies and sulks' (AGNES p. 48). They mirror each other's failures and lack of empathy, a point that is made repeatedly in the play, as can be seen from the following utterances: Agnes declares, 'We see ourselves repeated by those we bring into it all, either by mirror or rejection, honour or fault' (DB p. 49). Claire's ironic statement sums up the circular route love takes in their relationships:

CLAIRE You love Agnes and Agnes loves Julia and Julia loves me and I love you. We all love each other; yes we do. We love each other.

TOBIAS Yes?

CLAIRE (*Something of a sneer.*) Yes; to the depth of our self-pity and our greed. (DB p. 27)



Their love for each other does not extend beyond their self-concern, they all avoid commitment to others and share the silent agreement to do nothing and what is more to avoid a change in their way of life. Only Tobias in a moment of insight has confronted the realization that an existence of self-seeking satisfaction produces empty friendships and by implication empty family relationships. Tobias is unable to rise above his own and the family members' failure to alter their selfish approach into an attitude of communal love and care.

The play is brought full circle with Agnes regaining control over the situation by repeating the same words with which the play opens, 'What I find most astonishing', to then again deflect into the speculation that she may become mentally disturbed – 'aside from my belief that I will one day lose my mind' – (*DB* p. 92). Agnes finishes her reflections by invoking the astonishing wonder of the sun as opposed to the nightmarish darkness of the night: 'And when the daylight comes again . . . comes order with it [...] and we'll all forget. . . quite soon. [ . . . ] Come now; we can begin the day' (*DB* p. 93). Readers and viewers will have detected the irony contained in Agnes's statement since the development of the play has shown that the order Agnes invokes is a sham which disguises the return to an empty, loveless and highly vulnerable existence.

### **5.3.6 Conclusion:**

The statement made by the language is significant to the play's meaning: the words may vary but the constant re-enacting of the characters' self-centered concerns accounts for the static quality of the play. The plot, as has been seen, becomes a fully developed circle of emptiness, that begins with Harry and Edna

seeking refuge in Tobias's and Agnes's home and ends with the emotional vacuum that involves them all in the final scene.

In the following I will give a résumé of how, with the help of the tenets of pragmatics, readers and viewers are able to assess not only why the characters adopted certain strategies but also how they were deployed to convey the meaning of the play. Agnes's verbal manipulations that set the tone of the interaction are emblematic of her role as, to use Julia's words, a 'drill sergeant' (DB p.47) and of her intent to control the family unit. The framework provided by Brown and Levinson's socially defined variables, here manifested in the right Agnes deduces from her marital status, indicates that legal rights and social values are placed before emotional feelings. This can also be seen from Harry's and Edna's initial assumption that they 'belong' (EDNA p. 65) only to have to accept later that they are outsiders and that the concept of 'very best friend' (DB p. 31) is a cliché that does not give them the right to rerank the concept of social distance. Julia's statement 'You have no rights here.... (DB p. 55) coincides with Agnes's declaration that their responsibility is limited to the family circle: 'AGNES. But blood binds us. Blood holds us together when we've no more deep affection for ourselves than others.' (DB p. 83).

Agnes, as the text shows, resorts at times to off-record strategies to mitigate the demands she makes on others. On the other hand, she often depersonalizes her statements to make them into a generally accepted truth as a means to eliminate opposition from the other family members. Both Claire's and Julia's strategies are directed at defending their, albeit precarious, status in the family unit. Claire's ability to influence a situation is diminished by her bald on record statements that lack tact and sensitivity, are often offensive and do not have a positive effect.

Julia's verbal tantrums are FTAs void of redressive strategies that contain self-centered demands for the place she claims as rightfully hers. They both meet with a lack of sympathy and approbation from Agnes which Tobias supports and that in turn characterizes Claire's and Julia's attitude towards them. Tobias shows a remarkable lack of involvement through a vast range of avoidance strategies. He avoids commitment in the form of negative politeness that is especially noticeable when he tries to keep Edna and Harry from voicing their appeal for refuge at their appearance on the scene. Only after having gone through a process of painful recognition does he come to the realization that his evasive strategies have led to existential emptiness and to the loss of the capacity to love, which he articulates in a passionate speech in what constitutes the climax of the play. I have analysed Tobias's emotional turmoil using Watzlawick's explanations of analogic messages that are suitable to express innermost and often ambiguous feelings and emotions.

The strategies deployed expose the fully developed existential emptiness that results from the refusal of commitment and the various forms of avoidance strategies to disguise the lack of genuine human relations. Albee himself warns of the consequences of such an egotistic attitude:

I feel certain that audiences today will see that *A Delicate Balance* is not simply about the demands and responsibilities of friendship but concerns, even more, the paralysis that sets in as we evade, avoid, retrench and turn our backs on ourselves.<sup>269</sup>

The static nature of the characters is both significant and the basis of the play's strength. Far from offering a solution, Albee merely draws attention by

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<sup>269</sup> E. Albee, *A Delicate Balance*, (quote from the programme of the performance at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, August 1997).

means of a small family nucleus, to a deplorable socially and emotionally impoverished human existence. It is open to readers and viewers to detect an accusation and a warning to society in general.

## 6 Conclusion

Es liegt ein sonderbarer Quell der Begeisterung für denjenigen, der spricht, in einem menschlichen Antlitz, das ihm gegenübersteht; und ein Blick, der uns einen halbausgedrückten Gedanken schon als begriffen ankündigt, schenkt uns oft den Ausdruck für die ganze andere Hälfte desselben. Ich glaube, daß mancher große Redner, in dem Augenblick, da er den Mund aufmachte, noch nicht wußte, was er sagen würde. Aber die Überzeugung, daß er die ihm nötige Gedankenfülle schon aus den Umständen, und der daraus resultierenden Erregung seines Gemüts schöpfen würde, machte ihn dreist genug, den Anfang, auf gutes Glück hin, zu setzen.

*"Über das Verfertigen der Gedanken beim Reden". Heinrich von Kleist<sup>270</sup>*

The principal aim of this study has been to elaborate methods allowing me to show that findings and analytical tools from pragmatic investigation of ordinary speech can contribute to the practice of literary criticism. In accordance with this aim it has concentrated on a detailed demonstration of how the precise study of dialogue with reference to the concepts of pragmatics can shed light on the meaning of the analyzed plays. The application of explicit knowledge of how the language of talk works and its demonstration by means of practical examples has proven a relevant mode of analysis, achieving what mere description of the use of language in drama, which does not take into account the interrelation between speech and interaction, cannot. By dealing with the relation between what is actually said and what is meant and understood, pragmatics sheds light on meaning. Playwrights need not draw on explicit knowledge of linguistics to write effective conversation and neither do readers nor viewers need to be aware of the

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<sup>270</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, *Über die allmähliche Verfertigen der Gedanken beim Reden*, Internetausgabe. Version 11.02 © 2002 Kleist-Archiv Sembdner, Heilbronn, p.3 of 8.

underlying pragmatic linguistic concepts to appreciate the dialogue. Writers and readers do, though, deduce what is meant from what is said and seem to be able to infer intended meanings. The analysis by means of pragmatic linguistics formalizes these meanings, suggesting reasons as to why audiences can recover meaning from intentionally vague utterances and are also in a position to distinguish between utterances that are essentially informative and those that are significant on another level which is not directly derivable from the surface structure of the utterances.<sup>271</sup>

As I conclude this research an assessment of the benefits to be gained from my approach calls for a historical perspective. I have stressed the importance of the period which both inspired the analyzed plays and produced the main body of the theories I chose to employ (see my introduction in section 1). I am referring to the post-war era and particularly to the 1960s. With a view to signalling the contributions my study can make to the theoretical tools available to researchers of all periods, I reach far further back in quoting Heinrich Kleist as a preamble to this conclusion. The unspoken interaction between humans has been long sensed as a source of meaning parallel to language. The concern with ordinary language or everyday language to be understood in and by its context has occupied philosophers and linguists all through the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they turned their attention to dimensions of language other than statements, propositions or assertions. I have pointed out in the introduction of this study that dramatic dialogue also resolutely moved away from the rhetorical tradition to a relational approach and that the research and general debates around all these new and different perspectives influenced a broad range of approaches culminating in an

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<sup>271</sup> Compare section 3.2 of this thesis *The Pragmatic Approach in Literary Conversation*.

interdisciplinary concern with communication. Against this background of boundaries being crossed pragmatics proposes comprehensive methods of understanding. Stephen Levinson illustrates the inherent interdisciplinary character of pragmatics by maintaining that Charles Morris's (1938)<sup>272</sup> broad usage of the term which also includes psycholinguistics, social linguistics and more is still generally used.

From the 1950s to the 80s a redefinition of values gave rise to a critique of contemporary society as it expressed, or rather disguised, its ideological foundations within structures of communication. The exploration and creation of meaning became just as much the object of artistic endeavour as the subject of psychological and sociological study. Theatre sought its own place in representing and investigating changing conceptions of our societies. Labelling theatre 'the most public art' that 'offers the opportunity of acting out anxieties and fears which are born in the conflict between private and public value', T.W.E. Bigsby describes its evolution from the 1930s when 'it dramatized [...] the sheer density of social experience and the coercions of an economic system which seems to find no place for the self', to the post war period in which theatre 'seemed more intensely psychological, less convinced that experience could be subordinated to idea. Altogether less assured'. He goes on to draw the parallel between changes in the theatre and in other areas of endeavour: 'The new materialism breeds its own discontent and the word "alienation" infiltrated the language of sociologist and literary critic alike. Affluence, proudly proclaimed as a value, seemed to locate

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<sup>272</sup> See: C.W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1938).

the individual primarily as consumer.’<sup>273</sup> Playwrights both created and echoed this new consciousness. The extraordinary energy sweeping through culture, science and society as a whole during the 60s and 70s produced a body of theory as well as a cultural and social practice bent on decoding and thereby exposing intricately concealed mechanisms of alienation. A shift in meaning of the understanding of communication which owes much to a period when borderlines between social sciences, psychology and literature were blurred has most certainly enabled me to develop a detailed literary analysis with pragmatics. In the words of my own introduction to this study, ‘by contextualising language, and more specifically speech acts, pragmatics participates in an interdisciplinary preoccupation with the understanding of how externally determined power structures are interiorised’. I have attempted to illustrate conclusively how the methods I have developed give access to a broad understanding of the plays. I have, however, also demonstrated the pertinence of pragmatic linguistics for literary analysis in a broader sense by describing how the authors move beyond the strongly politically determined frameworks of their times in order to express convictions and that go beyond the specific historical and political moment in which the plays were produced. At the heart of Albee’s and Walser’s work there is always the insistence that the individual has to acknowledge responsibility for his actions even if the social constraints leave little space for their decisions. According to Bigsby Albee assumes that ‘alienation is a product of decisions taken, action deferred, myths endorsed, a freedom denied, rather than a simple consequence of capitalism’.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama. Volume 2: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 1-2.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. p.4.



Albee has often referred in interviews to his concern with the individual's lack of engagement which he has thematised in his plays as I have highlighted through the analysis of dialogue.

In my analysis of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* and *Die Zimmerschlacht* I have extensively referred to the influence of the socio-economic reality of the time (between the 60s and 80s) on the development of the plays and the representation of the attitude of the characters.<sup>275</sup> However, while Walser acknowledges the influence of social circumstances on the behaviour of the protagonists, the plays are more about private themes like aging or weariness within a marriage (existential needs). Walser like Albee does not want his work to be limited in its vision because of an insistence on a directly political relevance. Instead, and in keeping with the spirit of the period in which the plays were written and in his own words: 'Ich habe immer gesagt: ein Autor verändert sich im besten Falle dadurch, daß er schreibt, sich selber: Und ich habe immer mit Proust gesagt [...] daß ein Buch ein Instrument sei, mit dessen Hilfe der Leser besser in seinem eigenen Leben lesen könne.'<sup>276</sup> As I recapitulate below, the analysis of language in dramatic speech provides the means to elucidate how, like Albee, Walser leaves it up to the reader to sense whether the protagonists are in a position to seek a more rewarding communication with their fellow beings within the frame of a socially limited existence.

While my study is mainly oriented towards interaction between the characters, conclusions about author-reader communication are clearly derivable from their conversation. On one level the characters speak to each other, on

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<sup>275</sup> See my analysis of *Ein fliehendes Pferd* in section 5.2 and *Die Zimmerschlacht* in section 5.1.

<sup>276</sup> Birgit Lahan, 'Die Indiskreten' *Stern* 29 Dezember 2003 as quoted by Jörg Magenau p. 254

another the playwright is speaking to readers and viewers and explicit knowledge of language can be very valuable for the interpretation of this underlying level of communication. The following overview of the plays analysed in this study will further illustrate how categories from different key works on pragmatics are able to shed light on messages the plays seek to convey from playwright to reader/audience.

A practical example from *Die Zimmerschlacht* shows how author-reader communication is embedded in interaction between the characters. Here the flouting of a maxim of the Gricean Cooperative Principle, the Quality Principle (do not say what you believe to be false) in the interaction of the characters is echoed in the communication between writer and reader. Felix's deliberate failure to observe a maxim of the Cooperate Principle is successful in concealing from Trude his real motivation for staying away from Benno's party, whereas on the writer-reader level Felix's flouting of the quality principle, provides the audience with clues to question his behaviour. During the course of the interaction Felix will continue to deceive Trude for his own purpose, to avoid going to Benno's party. Leech's pragmatic explanation that if one deceives or misinforms indiscriminately communication will break down applies to the development of *Die Zimmerschlacht*, as Felix's concealing and deceiving strategies eventually bring about a conflict where the couple communicates through acrimonious bald on-record strategies.<sup>277</sup> With the final realization of their dependence on each other and on the society in which they live, Felix and Trude make a serious

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<sup>277</sup> See my elaborations on Leech, section 4.1.2 'Some General Properties of the Principles of Pragmatics' which explains that while the principles of pragmatics are descriptive not prescriptive, one cannot deceive or misinform indiscriminately since the point of the CP is that if speakers misinform indiscriminately we should no longer be able to communicate.

attempt at restoring their relationship. On the writer-reader level of communication the author indicates that by flouting the Gricean maxim of quality, they reassure each other of their feelings of superiority towards Benno and his new wife, making their decision to join Benno's party more acceptable.

*Ein fliehendes Pferd* deals with the confrontation between Helmut and Klaus and their apparently opposing attitudes to a life to which they both cling obstinately. The image which Helmut presents to the world has little to do with his real self and he finds satisfaction in withdrawing from any kind of social exposure as well as in being misunderstood by the outside world. Klaus on the other hand chases after success and social recognition and also looks for self-affirmation through his much younger wife Hel. Klaus's strategies show his determination to impose his own punctuation, his floutings of the tact maxim and his insistence on exploiting what Brown and Levinson describe as sociological variables by trying to bridge the social and temporal distance between himself and Helmut through rekindling mutual experiences from their school and university days.<sup>278</sup> Helmut's discomfort and his defensive attitude is made clear in his strategies of evasion mainly through a form of irony that undermines Klaus's criticism of his way of life but does not stop Klaus from pursuing a relationship based on his own needs.<sup>279</sup> Analyzed with Watzlawick's double bind theory, Hel's description of her relations with Klaus brings about towards the end of the play the collapse of Klaus's façade.<sup>280</sup> During the course of the play both protagonists' attitudes towards life are questioned by readers and viewers. Sabine is the one

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<sup>278</sup> On 'sociological variables' see section 4.2.2.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., on the description of Helmut's use of irony see for instance, section 5.2.5.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

character whose communicative strategies show enough self-confidence and courage not to rely on appearances and to confront reality.

While in the above mentioned plays, it is made clear that the characters are not prepared to address the real motivations that underlie their concealing strategies, in Albee's play *A Delicate Balance* the strategies used by the characters indicate to the reader a degree of self-absorption that makes them immune to the feelings of others. The intrusion of Harry and Edna, the 'best friends', merely brings out the corrosive self-centered relationships that hold them together, which are not based on mutual feelings but on a sense of legal rights. The home from which Claire is 'not going' (*DB* p. 33), and the room to which Julia repeatedly asserts her rights – 'my room' (*DB* p. 33) – offer only provisional protection from reality: 'CLAIRE. You're are a visitor as much as anyone now' (*DB* p. 53). The dialogue shows how each of the characters struggles to define their relationship, based on demands, needs and rights that leave no space for the wants of others, with the end of the play indicating that a precarious balance is restored.

The play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which premiered in 1962, ends on a more positive note than *A Delicate Balance* which was first shown four years earlier. Forced by the collapse of a cynical and mutually abusive dispute, the central characters of the play, Martha and George, must face the truth and make an attempt to forge a more honest relationship. Notwithstanding their wounding articulacy, their confrontation escalates to a breaking point where their self-centered behaviour, based on mutual offences and subjective fantasies, cannot be sustained any longer. George's final bald on record strategies are directed towards uncovering the hopelessness of their attitudes and compel Martha to recognize the necessity of facing reality. The younger couple, Nick and Honey, who are drawn

into the marital fight, must also recognize that behind their smooth and conformist appearance lies a hollow and flawed relationship. By means of the bitter dialogue that takes place between the two couples, Albee exhorts his audience to reflect on the erosion of the American Dream and its ethics of community, tolerance and compassion. The profane and offensive interaction which characterized Martha's and George's marital battles and may have shocked audiences in the 1960s now seems commonplace to a public used to swear words and explicit sexual scenes, yet the power and the brilliance of the dialogue still lives on, reflecting Albee's concern to unmask the false values and lack of engagement that is problematized time and again in his plays.

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* was and still is the most successful commercial and critical success of Albee's plays, but there were other works favourably received by the public and critics. *The Zoo Story*, Albee's one act play first shown in 1959, was greatly acclaimed after initial difficulties in finding a producer had been overcome, and Albee was hailed as the playwright who changed the theatre of the time. As John Guare wrote: 'You can't imagine the debt that every American playwright writing after 1960 owes to Edward Albee.'<sup>281</sup> This project has endeavoured to show that contemporary works from different origins, in this case Germany and the U.S., transcend cultural contexts demonstrating comparable perspectives while at the same time they can be understood as a product of the broader transnational context which produced them. This has been revealed through the analysis of the interaction between the characters which allows for the identification of meanings that lie hidden behind

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<sup>281</sup> John Guare, as quoted by Mel Gussow, *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey. A Biography* (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 1999), p. 129 quotes the program for the London Production of 'Three Tall Women', October 1994.

their words. The plays analyzed above show that Albee's and Walser's strategies as well as their overall messages are in many ways comparable. Helmut's concealment strategies in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* as well as Tobias's in *A Delicate Balance* signal their reluctance to expose themselves to new experiences. In both plays, as well as in *Die Zimmerschlacht*, the appearance of outsiders destabilizes deep-rooted interactional structures forcing the characters to question relationships based on false and unrealistic attitudes. Trude in *Die Zimmerschlacht*, like Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, will, at the height of the conflict with their respective spouses, resort to FTAs without redress in the form of insults in order to vent their disillusion with their partner's inability to live up to their expectations of the successful and virile male prescribed by contemporary society. Positive Politeness and bald on record strategies show that Sabine in *Ein fliehendes Pferd* and, interestingly, Ann in Albee's later play *Homelife* (2004)<sup>282</sup> are more confident than is initially suspected, in that they force their respective partners to come to terms with an emotionally distant and self-absorbed attitude. Walser and Albee have been criticized because their plays deal almost exclusively with personal relationships and do not treat the wider problems that affect contemporary society. This is a criticism both authors resist since they see the behaviour of the individual as partly responsible for the state of contemporary society. Of the novella *Ein fliehendes Pferd* Walser declares '[es] scheint mir [...] kein privater Befund zu sein, wie diese beiden Männer, Halm und Buch, auf verschiedene Weise Schein produzieren, Konkurrenzhaltungen

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<sup>282</sup> Edward Albee, *At Home at the Zoo* 1) *Homelife* 2) *The Zoo Story* (New York, London: Overlook Duckworth, 2008).

leben, die gewissermaßen die Person auffressen’.<sup>283</sup> Albee sees the individual’s responsibility in the context of wider society: ‘I doubt if I’d ever write a specifically political play [...] What I do write is about the states of mind that make these things – [...] Watergate and so on – possible.’<sup>284</sup> Both writers problematize the association between the private and the social by indicating how familial relationships are dependent on what society allows. Both question the values their protagonists have internalized and their adaptation to social conditions. The reader/viewer is confronted with the insight that one cannot live in isolation, that choices arising from interaction and the risks associated with it are unavoidable and that the characters in the plays will eventually have to confront the reality of their positions. While the problems identified by Albee and Walser provide common ground, their strategies suggest different solutions which have been made clear in the analysis of the texts and will be summarized here. Albee insists that the values abandoned through self-concern and lack of involvement must be reinvented. Agnes’s ironic statement at the end of *A Delicate Balance* ‘And when the daylight comes again . . . comes order with it’ (DB p. 93) implies that the family members, unable to meet the challenge of human commitment return to the vacuous existence they had lived before Harry’s and Edna’s demand for friendship. *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* presupposes that a radical change is possible while *A Delicate Balance* states that it is too late for such a change. On the writer and reader/viewer level, Albee issues a warning to rethink attitudes towards life before, in his own words, ‘they become rigid

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<sup>283</sup> As quoted by Jörg Magenau, pp. 354–55.

<sup>284</sup> *A Delicate Balance*, Programm of the Almeida Theatre, London, May 5th-July 2nd, 2011.

through disuse and that the opportunity of making choices vanishes ultimately'.<sup>285</sup>

Walser on the other hand holds the battle for economic success partly responsible for tempting the individual to adapt to questionable values which cause the loss of a more human attitude of mutual understanding. Walser does not share Albee's request for an albeit difficult new start that comprises the attempt to build a genuine relationship void of empty rhetoric and false illusions. Instead he proposes an acceptable (tolerable) coexistence with others, by adapting to social expectations, thereby also protecting one's own personality. This is achieved by resorting to strategies of non-compliance with one or more of the Gricean maxims – 'SABINE Ja so schön mußt Du weiter lügen dann wird alles gut' (*FP* p. 78).

Both Albee's and Walser's plays remain open ended, a new level of commitment may be urged but the action never takes us further than a moment of perception.

As has been explained in section 2, notwithstanding the fact that Edward Albee's and Martin Walser's works are influenced by different cultural and social premises, they readily allow a comparison not least because they are part of the same social and political context which produced the theories I have used to analyze them.<sup>286</sup> The analysis of interaction in the individual plays with reference to pragmatic devices has provided the means to explore and compare Albee's and Walser's works, as I have also indicated through cross-references to the different texts. Both authors indicate that when dealing with current problems they resort to the living speech of their age and that they will be in a better position to do so if issues of linguistic realism are taken into consideration. Dramatic dialogue works by exploiting the norms of conversational behaviour that the audience and the

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<sup>285</sup> Edward Albee, 'Thoughts and Answers', Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*, Programm of the Almeida Theatre, London, May 5th-July 2nd, 2011.

<sup>286</sup> See Section 2 'Preliminary Theoretical and Methodological Remarks'.



dramatist share. I have demonstrated that the analysis of dialogue with pragmatics makes use of principles and maxims that allow for the recovery of meaning from often purposely vague utterances. The detailed analysis of interaction based on pragmatic categories contributes a significant insight into the plays that an approach to the text which does not consider the interrelation between language and interaction could not convey.

It has been indicated that Edward Albee's and Martin Walser's plays are constructed more on language than on action which makes them especially suitable for interpretation with pragmatic concepts.<sup>287</sup> A common denominator in their plays is the lack of solidarity and empathy towards others and the way in which, under the disguise of drawing room plays, the readers/viewers are made aware of the authors' criticism of a society that provides good cause for a critical attitude. The usefulness of the analysis of literary texts of the sort that has been undertaken in this research lies in its ability to heighten our perception of focus and meaning in the work of individual authors. The application of pragmatic linguistics has provided means of gaining valuable insights and drawing comparisons between the work of two significant contemporary authors of different origin and their attitudes towards society.

On September 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 *The New York Times* published an obituary under the title: 'Edward Albee, Trenchant Playwright Who Laid Bare Modern Life, Dies at 88'. Its author quotes Albee:

'All plays, if they're any good, are constructed as correctives,' he told *The Guardian* in 2004. 'That's the job of the writer.'

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<sup>287</sup> See for instance Section 1 'Introduction'.

Holding that mirror up to people. We're not merely decorative, pleasant and safe.'<sup>288</sup>

If – as I believe – by dedicating this study to the analysis of language in drama, I have been able to better describe and understand the workings of that mirror, I feel justified in having broadened the realm of the application of pragmatics to literary criticism.

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<sup>288</sup> Bruce Weber, 'Edward Albee, Trenchant Playwright Who Laid Bare Modern Life, Dies at 88' nytimes.com, 16 September 2016 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/17/arts/edward-albee-playwright-of-a-desperate-generation-dies-at-88.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/17/arts/edward-albee-playwright-of-a-desperate-generation-dies-at-88.html?_r=0)> [accessed 11 December, 2016].

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